

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

History, landscape and national identity

a comparative study of contemporary English and Icelandic literature for children

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Award date:
2002

Awarding institution:
Coventry University
University College Worcester

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HISTORY, LANDSCAPE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AND
ICELANDIC LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
of the University of Coventry
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

APRIL 2002

University College Worcester
in association with Coventry University

ABSTRACT

This literary study is a comparative analysis of 86 contemporary English and Icelandic children's books, mainly published in 1970-1999. The main argument is that the children's literature of a particular nation provides a key to understanding the nation's frame of mind, what stirs its emotions and provokes its thoughts; that children's literature reveals the nature of the nation's relationship with its surroundings, its interaction with the national landscape and its concept of space. Moreover, children's books can demonstrate how the national imagination is linked with the local landscape and its peculiarities through memories, myths and meanings.

A theoretical model was constructed to demonstrate the interplay between landscape and history, and to make explicit the hidden constructs of national identity. Working with that model, employing a cultural materialist viewpoint – which embraces perspectives from different fields – made it possible to elucidate notions of national identity embedded in the texts.

The comparative study made explicit differences between the English and the Icelandic approach to class, family, community, institutions of state, popular culture and politics. The dissimilarities are rooted in the histories and landscapes of the two nations, which are vastly contrasting. The outcome of the study implies that the Icelandic nation seems secure in its identity: the experiences of history have produced a national attitude of unity. In contrast, the evidence shows that English national identity is marked by division, in terms of class and region, landscape and language. The study shows that there is a richness in difference. Although overarching global movements would lead us to believe that assimilation into a common culture is either inevitable or desirable, there are nonetheless radical differences, which are drawn from the relationships determined by history and landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For all their support, friendly advice and constant encouragement, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr. Jean A. Webb and Dr. Sigrun Klara Hannesdottir, and to Tony Watkins and Silja Adalsteinsdottir, who were my external experts. My gratitude also goes to the Graduate School at University College Worcester, the staff and the team of PhD-students, who have made this expatriate feel at home in England. Special thanks to fellow students Jorunn Elidottir and Janet Fuerst for their generosity and constant support. No words can express the gratitude I feel towards my husband, Hilmar Hilmarsson, for never resenting taking second place to this thesis for three years and for bringing up our children single-handedly for most of that time. I thank him, my children, Sisi and Hilmar jr., and my whole family for their endless belief in me.

I also want to thank RANNIS (The Icelandic Graduate Students Research Fund) and the British ORS (Overseas Research Students Fund) for financially supporting this research.

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The fact is that a sense of place plays a profound part in the emotional structure of most people, not only of writers, and the various ways in which that sense can be recognized, developed, related to other kinds of awareness and in general cultivated can help to make our lives more interesting.

(Daiches and Flower 1979, 7)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite their immense capacity for humane sympathies, our greatest authors are not independent of their own cultural framework.

(Lott 1993, 40)

This study is an analysis of a selection of children's books from two countries, England and Iceland, conducted in order to determine the importance of children's literature in the composition and preservation of national identity. It evaluates the correlation between children's literature, a particular place, and the culture which produced it. I use literature written for children to examine the bond, or the assumed bond, between the child as a literary construct, the culture that nurtured it, the surrounding landscape, and the nation to which the child belongs. The key words in this evaluation are landscape, history, heritage and tradition – which contribute to the process of forming national identity.

The central premise is that a nation's landscapes and its history have an important part in the formation of the pattern of its members' national identity: I demonstrate that these are the major factors for establishing the bond between an individual and his or her nation.

This study therefore concentrates on the representation of landscape and history in children's literature in order to evaluate the roles of these as differentiating factors in the development of national identity. It concentrates not only on physical landscapes as represented in children's literature, but on imagined landscapes, too, or the role of representative landscapes in the construction and preservation of national identity. History is also considered both factually and fictionally: the "facts" being historical artefacts and accounts; the fictions are the stories passed down from generation to generation.

Furthermore, the relationship between landscape and history is studied: how the national landscape has affected the nation's history and how history has in turn wrought the national landscape. This interplay is considered as it appears in children's books of both nations. The question is also considered whether there is in fact such a thing as a "national children's literature" and if it differs from other "national children's literatures." Other

aims include highlighting children's literature as a means of understanding a nation, since, as a cultural product, books written for children reflect the ideas and opinions of a given community. Even more importantly, children's literature involves a dual representation: it not only shows some of the dominant ideas and opinions of the nation – but also shows how the nation wishes to present itself.

For the past three decades of the twentieth century, children's literature has played an important part in what David Lowenthal calls “the heritage crusade” – a huge surge of interest in the past and ancestral legacies (Lowenthal 1998). As heritage plays a vital part in the composition of national identity, it is also imperative for my discussion.

One major aim is to produce a model, combining the key words: history, landscape and identity, which can be applied in wider circumstances. The model demonstrates that there are constructs within children's literature that sustain national identity, and by doing so, underscores the importance of children's literature in the creation and re-creation of present and future cultures and nations.

1.1. Why Children's Literature?

Children's literature is a field which has enjoyed increased attention on an international scale for the past decade, although prior to that it was hardly considered worthy of academic study. As late as at the outset of the 1990s, Peter Hunt pointed out in *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* that “to the academic, children's literature is a non-subject. Its very subject-matter seems to disqualify it from serious adult consideration; after all, it is simple, ephemeral, popular, and designed for an immature audience” (Hunt 1991B, 6). These assumed attributes need not have negative implications, especially when considering the suitability of the subject for this particular study.

Quoting Hunt's statement, Shelagh Squire argues:

From a cultural studies perspective, however, these conventional points of criticism are, in fact, strengths. It must be emphasized that because such literature is written by adults for children, its 'simplistic' and 'ephemeral' form can be a potent medium through which a range of adult values and conventions are communicated and, by extension, perpetuated.

(Squire 1996, 77)

The field of children's literature is, for these reasons, an ideal source of material for research into the values and conventions of a nation: it is the channel through which a number of cultural codes and messages are transmitted to the young. Eric Miraglia points out that "People **learn** culture" (Miraglia, et al. 1999). Children are not born with a knowledge of the cultural codes of their society; they learn them, and through these codes they learn how to behave; they learn about their nation, the nation's history and ancestral background. Before the age of literature, these codes were passed to the young through myth and other narratives. From the late 18th century, literature has become one of these narrative channels, and in particular literature written for children. Tony Watkins says:

Social reality is a vast network of narratives that we use to make sense of experience, to understand the present, the past and the future. Narratives give us the shape of our identity as individuals and as members of a socially symbolic reality. . . . So the stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world. They contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a "home" in the world.

(Watkins 1992, 183)

Most of the stories that Watkins refers to have been written down: they are conserved in children's books – and literature for children could accordingly be depicted as "maps of meaning" which help a child to find a home in the world. According to Watkins, this "home" can have at least three different meanings: first as an interior space, second, the homeland – in the country or the city – and third: a place, a "*heimat*" that human beings inevitably strive for (all these meanings will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7).

Children's literature is, for these grounds, one of the most advantageous sources to study "how a nation thinks." Maria Nikolajeva formulates the following question in her

Introduction to *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*: "Is there such a thing as national children's literature that reflects national mentality, specific social history, views on education, and so on?" (Nikolajeva 1995, xi). The study presented here should show that there is indeed such a thing – and that children's literature is an ideal source for viewing "national mentality" (a term which will be scrutinised in Chapter 5), social history and selected pertinent national institutions, including education.

Children's literature is overseen, regulated, produced and distributed by elders, who can select which values and norms are preferable for transmitting to the next generation. The educational tendency for using children's literature to help children understand different aspects of culture proves how culturally important the subject is. Even children's books that deal with non-conformists or outcasts of society, such as Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996) – a story which deals with controversial issues like drugs, prostitution and sex – convey, through their very non-conformity, a contrast to the accepted "norm" of the society, and thus reveal and expose its fundamental nature. Nonetheless, a number of children's books writers often seek to evade sensitive and controversial issues. This raises the question as to whether children's books are just "edited" reflections of culture and do not reflect the full compass of the "true" culture itself? These controversial questions will be considered in Chapter 4, which centres on the transmission of values.

1.2. England versus Iceland

The English and the Icelandic nations were selected as a subject for this comparative study for a number of reasons, which could be divided into three main categories: personal, political and physical. Before going further into these categories, it should be emphasized that using the term "England" means, in the scope of this study, that other parts of the Britain are excluded, for physical and political reasons. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have undeniably more in common with Iceland than England, both as regards geography (e.g. Scottish landscapes, which, particularly in the islands, closely resemble

Icelandic landscapes) and political history, because, like Iceland, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been colonized.

The personal objective relates to my background. Being a native Icelandic, who has studied English literature for eight years at university level, four of them in the United Kingdom, my background permits me to take a position between the two cultures. My experience as a published children's book writer (Palsdottir 1997) provides me with insight into the process of writing for children from a cultural point of view, and having translated two children's books, Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* ("Gyllti attavitinn" 2000) and *The Subtle Knife* ("Lumski hnifurinn" 2001) from English into Icelandic enables me to recognize cultural indicators embedded in the text, as these often create problems in the course of translation.

Political reasons for choosing England and Iceland concern both the independency of the two nations and the interaction between them. Both are independent, democratic countries, and both are part of the European cultural heritage. However, the dissimilarities are considerable. First, the national histories of the two countries are remarkably different; the most important factor being that England has been an imperial power for three centuries, and that Iceland lost its independence to Norway in 1262, was relinquished to the Danish in 1387, and remained colonized by them until 1944, when the nation finally acquired full independence. Second, whereas England's population is large and multicultural, counting around 50 million people, Iceland's is small and mostly homogenous, consisting of less than three hundred thousand people. English is spoken by millions all over the world, but Icelandic is spoken almost only by the Icelanders, few as they are. Both cultures have, however, one crucial factor in common: they have a plentiful supply of narratives, embedded in the national spirit and the national landscape, expressed and reiterated in the national literature.

There has been an interrelationship between England and Iceland for centuries. The English have fished off the rocky coasts of Iceland for ages, and, as Terry Lacy points out, they “were so busy fishing in Icelandic waters that the fifteenth century is known in Icelandic history as the English Century” (Lacy 1998, 53). The English also made many attempts, some successful, some in vain, to defy the trade bans issued by the Danish and sell goods to Icelanders. Iceland was occupied by the British in 1940 and a year later handed over to the U.S.A. Literary connections are also strong, as William Morris’ *Icelandic Journals*, written in the early 1870s (Morris 1996) and Auden & MacNeice’s *Letters from Iceland*, from 1937 (Auden and MacNeice 1969) show. The English have borrowed heavily from Icelandic sagas and the Eddas, and Icelanders have read great works of English literature, both in their original language and in translation. Furthermore, Romanticism has had a great influence in both countries, especially on the construct of the child and attitudes towards nature.

Lastly, the two countries were well suited for comparison because of physical reasons. Although they are both islands and geographically quite close (with only the ocean between them and less than a three hour flight between the capitals, London and Reykjavik), the natural physiognomies are entirely unlike. The landscapes of England offer a remarkable contrast to those of Iceland. Whereas much of rural England has lush meadows and cultured fields, Iceland’s landscapes are, for the most part cruel, wild, untamed. John Ross Browne, a traveller to Iceland in the late 19th century, wrote an account of his first impression of the country in his book, *The Land of Thor*:

It would be difficult to conceive of anything more impressive than this first view of the land of snow and fire. A low stretch of black boggy coast to the right; dark cliffs of lava in front; far in the background, range after range of bleak, snow-capped mountains, the fiery Jokuls dimly visible through drifting masses of fog; to the left a broken wall of red, black, and blue rocks, weird and surf-beaten, stretching as far as the eye could reach -- this was Iceland! All along the grim rifted coast the dreadmarks of fire, and flood, and desolation were visible. Detached masses of lava, gnarled and scraggy like huge clinkers, seemed tossed out into the sea; towers, buttresses, and battlements, shaped by the very elements of destruction, reared their stern crests against the waves; glaciers lay glittering upon the blackened slopes behind; and foaming torrents of snow-water burst

through the rifted crags in front, and mingled their rage with the wild rage of the surf. All was battle, and ruin, and desolation.

(Browne 1867, 426)

Although this account was written in the late 1860s, it could still be applied to describe large parts of Iceland. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, only 23.3% of the country is cultivated, and another 19.4% cultivable, which leaves the main, central part of Iceland, practically uninhabitable (Icelandic Agriculture 2000).

Even though Cornwall has its cliffs and crags, most parts of England are, on the contrary, cultivated and heavily populated. Whereas population density (per square km.) in Iceland was 3 in 1997, there were 240 people, or 80 times more, to each square kilometre in the United Kingdom at the same time (CyberSchoolBus 2001). The English landscape's contrast to its Icelandic counterpart is manifested in the words of Alun Howkins – a historian who describes the image of the English landscape as commonly depicted by poets in the beginning of the 20th century: “It is rolling and dotted with woodlands. Its hills are smooth and bare, but never rocky or craggy . . . Above all it is cultivated” (Howkins 1986, 64). Granted, both Howkins' account and Browne's sketch of Iceland (above), are literary accounts, not necessarily “true”, but literary depictions of landscape *are* what this thesis has to do with.

Urban landscapes are also immensely contrasting in the two countries. England has large, metropolitan cities, with more than eight million people living in London, a million people in Birmingham and a little under half a million in Manchester. However, Iceland's capital and only city, Reykjavik, plus its surrounding communities, counts about 170,000 people, and the largest town, Akureyri, has roughly 15,000 inhabitants.

Hence, the contrasting landscapes, as well as the political disparity, rendered England and Iceland ideally suited for a comparative study on national identity, the effect of landscape and place, and the influence of history – as reflected in children's books.

1.3. Language: Adaptations and Limitations

Language had to be defined for the thesis. As it is submitted to an English university, and almost all of the secondary material is English, the work is written in English. Obviously, text quotations from Icelandic children's books had to be translated into English, and I have taken the liberty of doing so (indicating them with "my transl."). A translation of the Icelandic title is provided in parentheses in the text and in the list of "Primary Sources: Icelandic Children's Books" at the end of the thesis. Titles in Icelandic, as well as the author's names, often contain letters unique to the Icelandic language, some of which had to be "anglicised" for the convenience of the English reader.

I have adopted an international convention of converting Icelandic letters to a comprehensible (and pronounceable) counterpart. Therefore, the letter "þ" in this study becomes "th", "æ" becomes "ae", and the letter "ð" becomes "d". Furthermore, the Icelandic alphabet contains a number of letters with accentuation marks, which mean a slight difference in pronunciation. These are á, é, í, ó, ú and ý. In order to make author's names and book titles intelligible for the English reader, the accentuation marks have been left out, and these letters become a, e, i, o, u and y. Icelandic has a specific tradition of recording the authors of references, listing the first name first, but the English tradition of listing the last name first, followed by the first name, has been adopted for listing authors of all nationalities in the list of children's books and Works Cited. Furthermore, in Iceland, people generally go by their first name, and authors are discussed accordingly in Icelandic articles, but here the English tradition of using last names is embraced.

1.4. Theoretical Considerations - Structural Framework

The study of literature as an important aspect in the formation and continuation of national identity gains added depth by comparison and contrast between two national literatures: strong points in one draw attention to the weaknesses of the other, and vice versa. Discussing the comparative approach, Leonard Thompson says that it enables a researcher

to consider how comparative history can contribute to modern knowledge. Thompson says:

[I]n *The Comparative Imagination*, Fredrickson welcomes the increasing tendency of historians of the United States to write from a “comparative perspective,” by using foreign examples to explain what is distinctive about American society. (Fredrickson 1997; Thompson 1998, 48)

This argument can also be applied to literature: examples from “other” literatures help to explain what is distinctive about English literature, and vice versa. A comparative approach seemed therefore pertinent for this study: it would enable me to identify the parallels and divergences which help to reveal which factors could have an influence on identity, and which not. The advantages of using a comparative approach in a study involving national identity are numerous. If merely one nation’s literature was considered, the results could be informative, but not particularly so in a European or international context. However, if the literature of two nations is compared and contrasted, the outcome is, I would suggest, relevant from a European or global perspective.

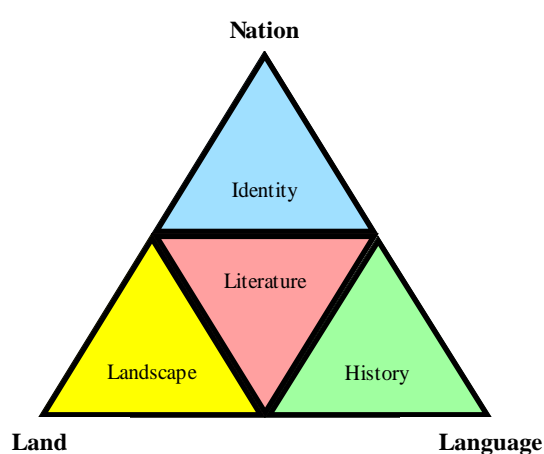
The study of text as a product of culture, country and nation necessitates adopting methodology and concepts from different disciplines, e.g. anthropology, cultural studies, history, environmental studies, psychology and human geography. These fields have been considered where relevant. Therefore, the methodological approach selected for this study is a combination of inter-disciplinary theories, but still the main framework consists of literary theory. An amalgamation of a literary, post-colonial and historical viewpoint was needed, plus social criticism, and a means for “re-viewing” landscape and history in literature.

As a study of this kind has not, to my knowledge, been conducted before, I have had to design a model by which the thesis could be organized. Many disciplines within academia have a basic paradigm for researchers to adhere to, for instance from a literature review to pilot study to main study, etc. Conversely, this thesis is based on a set of abstract ideas

from different disciplines, which have generally not been linked together, and therefore the framework had to be made from scratch. However, some key words concerning cultural materialism provided me with the proper tools to approach the research. These are explained more thoroughly in the next chapter (on theoretical background), but here it is important to note that these keywords concern the transmission of values, national institutions, notions of class, national myths, man's interaction with the environment (home, landscape), the influence of history on modern generations, and the question of heritage.

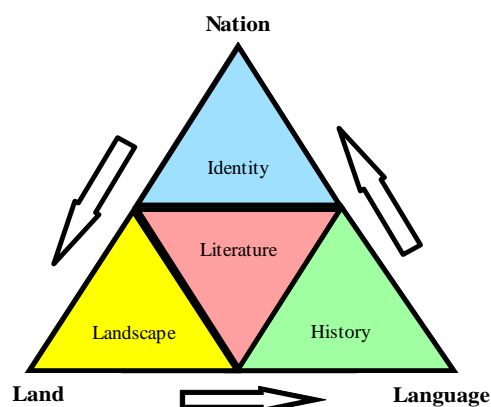
The structure would have to connect the central keywords – history, landscape, national identity and children's literature – in a logical order. It would have to show how these are all interlinked with each other and how all of them play a part in the composition of a fully-fledged member of a nation. In brief, it would have to chart the uncharted seas.

As a navigator finding his or her way through uncharted territory, I worked with triangulation, starting with the basic idea suggested by Gisli Sigurdsson that the interplay between the *land*, the *nation* and the *language* produces the foundation for Icelandic national identity (Sigurdsson 1996, 46). This trinity joins forces with my key words to form the central construction and model for my thesis, best depicted by a triangle:

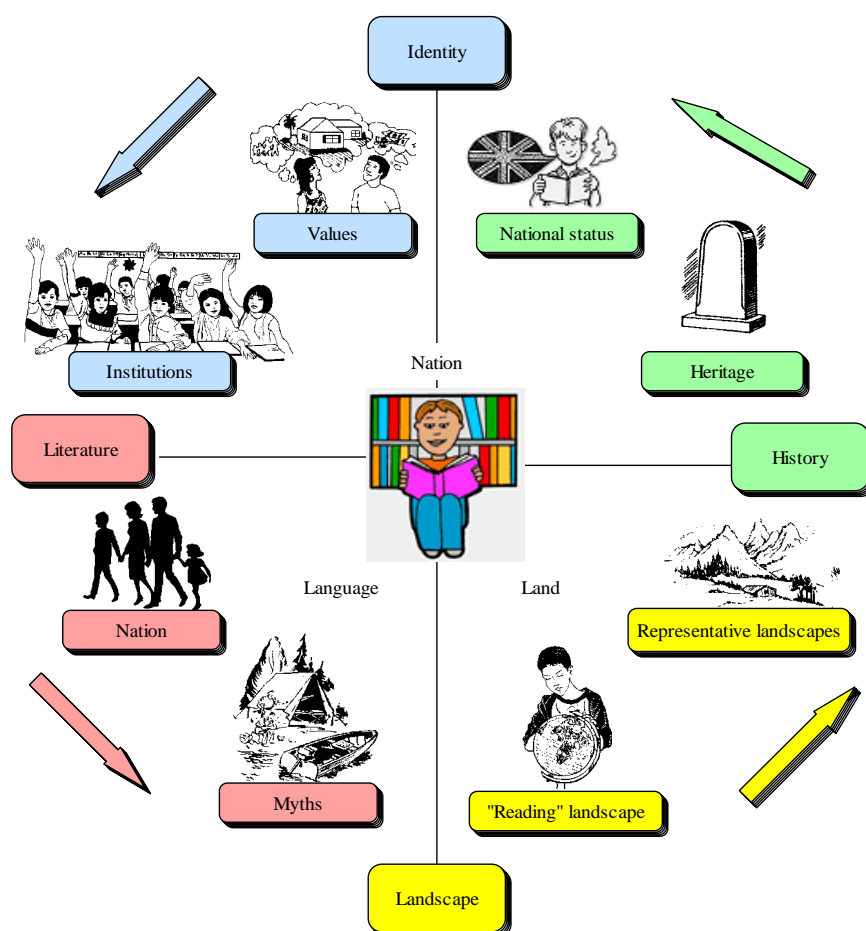


The triangulation “tessellates” the key concepts – landscape, history and identity – within the trinity of nation, land and language, with literature at the centre.

The thesis is structured upon this triangular model. Because the tessellation is made up of equal parts, it was hard to decide where to begin and where to end. National identity is the central concept, and thus identity should be the starting point – moving through landscape and history, intertwining these with language and literature:



Identity would also be the finishing point. Having gathered evidence from the other parts of the triangle, I could draw a conclusion based on their relevance in the formation of national identity. The accumulated evidence and the conclusion should show that each of the parts works as an important component of the whole. Employing the colours of the triangle for clarity, my concept map shows how the ordering of the chapters of this thesis has been arranged to follow these outlines:



Thus, after the introductory, methodology and background chapters (Chapters 1 through 3), starting from an individual's identity within society, I move in Chapter 4 to the basic values of society and its institutions to how "the system" works and how it deals with problems. Evidently, space does not allow for an in-depth study of this area. It is, however, relevant to study how they are reflected in children's books – with criticism or approval – as these are the systems that the nation depends on for upholding its "togetherness".

National identity and national character are the main subjects of Chapter 5. Particularities of the English and the Icelandic nations are analysed, in particular the commemorations of World War II in English children's books and the fight for independence in Icelandic children's books. Home and the attachment to locality is discussed in Chapter 6, and (as the progress approaches the "land" part of the triangle) mental and physical landscape – mindscapes and landscapes – that is, how the child is "cultured" to look at landscape

according to the conventions of its society. Patriotism and myths associated with the “homeland” are discussed in Chapter 7, which explores the national relationship with landscape where it is linked to national identity and patriotism, reviewing approaches to the country and the city in children’s books. The symbolic functions of national landscapes are also analysed by looking at how “representative landscapes” are rendered in writing for children.

Chapter 8 introduces history and heritage – or how children’s writers wrestle with the past – into the discussion of landscape and national identity. Tying landscape with history, the discussion begins with viewing the footsteps of the ancestors: how these have been “sealed” into the landscape in children’s books (with the presentation of memorials, significant ruins and gravestones). The increasingly popular concept of heritage is considered, and its role in sustaining cultural and national identity. The last part of Chapter 8 moves into a post-colonial perspective, to examine how each nation’s historical background – England’s as an imperialist nation and Iceland’s as a dominated one – replicates itself in the nation’s writing for children. Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 9) summarizes the thesis and recapitulates my findings, using the retrospective vision to attempt a prediction of the future.

In an era of increased globalisation, when individuals fear displacement and assimilation into a large-scale, unidentifiable culture, it seems ever more necessary to establish some secure base to stand on: a common identity with the other members of the nation to which the person belongs. This means looking for what the individual has in common with the other members of her or his society. In his Introduction to a book section titled “European landscape and identity,” John Agnew says:

A national identity involves a widely shared memory of a common past for people who have never seen or talked to one another in the flesh. This sense of belonging depends as much on forgetting as on remembering, the past being reconstructed as a trajectory to the national present in order to guarantee a common future.

(Agnew 1998, 215)

One way of reconstructing the past is through children's books, and thus a course to the present can be tracked, guiding the way to a common future. Considering children's books as a mirror held up to history, culture, nation and society – both “now” and “then” – the following thesis examines the reflection in an attempt to see what it is that makes the people of England and Iceland what they are today and consider what they will be tomorrow.

CHAPTER 2

PREVIOUS WORK AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

But history is not simply what we know of the past; it is also how our living in the present—as part of continuing history—clarifies and “perspectivizes” the past.
(Nelson 1988, 38)

The function of this chapter is to provide a theoretical and historical background to the study in order to underpin the structural model. It is divided into nine sections. The first section elucidates my definition of what children’s literature is and what sets it apart from other kinds of literature. The next two sections study the current situation in children’s literature research in England and Iceland, with some hindsight upon the development of children’s literature criticism in both countries. Section four concentrates on the basis of comparison, and what can be gained by putting two national literatures side by side, analysing the chosen texts against and in the society that produced them. The fifth section, “Universals and Dissimilarities”, continues with comparison and contrast. Section six puts together children’s literature and cultural studies, emphasizing the importance of the connection between the two for this thesis, carrying on into a closer analysis of theories on culture and landscape in sections seven and eight. The ninth and final section covers the methodology used, based on the triangular model introduced in the Introduction.

2.1. What is Children’s Literature?

This opening section defines children’s literature as a genre and examines its situation within the literary discussion in general. Children’s literature is based on the concept of a child: that there is a specific group of readers which can be classified as children, and that distinct types of books can be written and produced for this section of the population. The notion of childhood generally refers to people who are not adults, but its implication can vary from country to country and time to time. Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg reflect upon its flexible connotation in *Thatcher’s Children*:

The French historian Philippe Ariès first published his famous and important work *Centuries of Childhood* in 1959. Since then, sociologists around the world have,

from time to time and with varying degrees of conviction, endorsed the book's central tenet, namely that childhood is socially constructed and is, thus, specific to certain times and places in human history.

(Pilcher and Wagg 1996, 1)

It was not the same to be a child in England or Iceland in 1900 and 2000, and even at this moment, it is not the same to be a child in these countries as in some parts of the world where children are supposed to shoulder the responsibilities and strain of full-time work even before they reach puberty.

Consequently, the meaning of the term children's literature could vary the world over, but as this study covers two Western-European countries where childhood at the moment generally means the same (i.e. an upper limit of approximately 16 years, which is also school-leaving age in both countries), I rely on the English definition of children's literature for my discussion. In his *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature*, published in 1983, Robert Bator goes back to F.J. Harvey Darton's definition from 1941:

A more serviceable definition, also by Darton, is "books originally meant to be read, or in fact habitually read, by young persons under the age of (approximately) 15, in their leisure hours, for enjoyment." This is the best of the inclusive definitions for the study of a particular period of literature for children.

(Bator 1983, 4; Darton 1941, 553)

Peter Hunt's more recent and less age-restricted definition upholds this stance in the contemporary position: "Children's literature, disturbingly enough, can quite reasonably be defined as books read by, especially suitable for, or especially satisfying for, members of the group currently defined as children" (Hunt 1991B, 61). A combination of these definitions is suitable to describe what I mean by "children's literature" in this thesis.

The origins of children's literature can, in both England and Iceland, be traced back to the 18th century. In England, *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) by John Newbery is the book from which English children's literature is commonly dated, and in Iceland the first children's book is generally considered to be *Barnaljod* by Vigfus Jonsson, published in

1780 (“Poetry for Children” 1780). Both literatures have developed along similar lines: from their original function, which was in both countries primarily educational and informational, they have progressed towards fulfilling the “enjoyment” and “satisfying” purpose depicted by Darton and Hunt. The next two sections provide a brief overview of the development of children’s literature criticism, first in England, then in Iceland, and the present situation of children’s literature studies as a scholarly field in both countries has also been considered. This synopsis has been included in order to set my research against previous work and articulate the theoretical positions which underpin this work.

2.2. Children’s Literature Research in England

Writing for children as a literary form in England has existed for approximately as long as the novel, but it has taken longer for children’s literature to be recognized as a fully developed genre in its own right. Felicity Hughes points out that John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, “was published within a decade of Richardson’s *Pamela*” (Hughes 1990, 71).¹ Hughes claims that during the 19th century, both children’s books and the novel were appraised along similar lines, that is according to their value for providing moral, social and literary education of British youth. At the beginning of the 20th century, criticism of the novel on one hand and of children’s literature on the other, started to take different directions and novels received increased literary recognition and status.

Children’s books, on the other hand, kept their “unliterary” status for several more decades, and in 1978, when Hughes’ article was originally published, they were still considered “low” literature. Children’s literature was, for example, so “worthless” that it was often excluded from histories of literature. In an article originally written in 1976, Clifton Fadiman says: “[L]iterary historians leave out children’s literature, as they might leave out the ‘literature’ of pidgin-English” (Fadiman 1983, 8). In 1986, Zohar Shavit pointed out that “Most children's books are not considered part of the cultural heritage, and hence national histories of literature barely mention children’s books, if at all” (Shavit

1986, 35). When Hughes' article, above, was republished in a collection edited by Peter Hunt twelve years later, children's literature was still battling for recognition within academia, although there were established postgraduate courses at Reading, Roehampton and Warwick. Hunt comments on the article that "*we can see the need for intellectual and academic justification. It is a microcosm of a struggle that is still going on*" (Hunt 1990A, 70).

However, as the 1990s moved on, children's literature started to find its way into academia: Tony Watkins and Zena Sutherland state that "In 1992, the Children's Literature Association issued a *Directory of Graduate Studies in Children's Literature* which listed courses at over 200 institutions" in the United States (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 293-94). Academic recognition took longer in Britain, but Peter Hunt reported in 1994 that the database at The Children's Literature Research Centre at the Roehampton Institute then listed around 25 courses in higher and further education in the UK (Hunt 1994, 3). Now, at the turn of the century, more courses have been added at colleges and universities all over Britain. There are a number of active research centres within the United Kingdom, including the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) at Roehampton, the Centre for International Research in Childhood, Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL) in Reading, not to mention the centre which hosted my research: The Primary English and Children's Literature Research Centre in Worcester. A number of associations have been established in Britain, such as the Children's Book Circle, the Children's Book History Society, the Association of Children's Literature Lecturers and the Federation of Children's Book Groups. English scholars are actively involved in international associations, such as the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) and the Children's Literature Association (ChLA).

¹ *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* was first published in two volumes in 1740. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)
Footnote continued on next page.

The 1990s also saw a number of publications on critical research, such as Peter Hunt's *Criticism, Theory and Children's literature* (Hunt 1991B) and *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism* (Hunt 1992), Maria Nikolajeva's *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (Nikolajeva 1996), Roderick McGillis' *The Nimble Reader: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (McGillis 1996), and *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* by Margery Hourihan (Hourihan 1997). Moreover, periodicals like *Books for Keeps*, and research journals, such as *Signal*, *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly* and *The Lion and the Unicorn*, plus a number of conferences all over the world, keep scholars constantly up to date with what is happening within the widening world of children's literature.

Children's literature critics have applied various literary theories to children's books – including narrative theory (Hunt 1984-85; Hunt 1990B), reader response theory (Bunbury and Tabbert 1992), theories of class (Nikola-Lisa 1994; Wojcik-Andrews 1993) – and diverse approaches: an “issues approach” (Rudman 1976), a “communications approach” (Rudd 1992) and a “semiotic approach” (Nikolajeva 1995). Feminists have explored the field (Moss 1982; Myers 1992; Paul 1990; Paul 1998) and so have scholars with an interest in fairy tale and folklore (Moebius 1992; Sullivan III 1990; Zipes 1983) – and some have combined both feminist and fairy tale criticism (Bottigheimer 1992; Clark 1993-1994). Children's literature has been analysed from a postcolonial viewpoint (Harper 1997; McGillis 1999; Nodelman 1992), a Marxist viewpoint (Phillips and Wojcik Andrews 1990), and post-modern impulses have been reviewed (Apseloff 1990; Stevenson 1994).

For the last few years, a branch of children's literature research has been moving towards a cultural viewpoint. Perry Nodelman says:

[L]iterary theories of many kinds, from reception theory to gender studies, has encouraged me to understand that texts, all texts, exist within a complex network

is considered a founder of the English modern novel.

of ideas and images and cultural values—and that includes apparently simple texts written for children.

(Nodelman 1997, 5)

Each literary theory, whether one adheres to it or not, reveals a new aspect of texts written for children, and, as Nodelman implies, the more they are analysed, the more complex these texts seem. Furthermore, their relation to cultural systems and social networks becomes increasingly obvious. Children's literature criticism in England, as in some other countries, has consequently moved towards exploring how children's books reflect and interact with culture, history, and national identity.

2.3. Children's literature Research in Iceland

Most secondary sources on children's literature do not in fact treat children's literature; what they portray instead is the history of childhood reading in a particular country. Because the authors of these studies are interested in the pedagogical aspects of children's literature, what they look for in children's books is subject matter, ideology, and didactic and educational values . . . I do not mean that pedagogical aspects of children's literature are of no importance . . . What I mean is that children's literature research has neglected the literary aspects in favor of the pedagogical, while these in fact are closely related.

(Nikolajeva 1996, 4-5)

Whereas children's literature in England has evolved as a full and complex literary stratum, receiving tribute from scholars in several fields, its literary significance has been neglected in Iceland – in favour of the pedagogical. A survey of research projects on children's literature in Iceland conducted by Agusta Palsdottir in 1999 shows, in her words, that “a relatively small number of studies have been conducted in this field” (Palsdottir 2000, 233). According to Palsdottir, the first article written on the subject of children's books in Iceland was written in 1970 and since then the total number of research articles amount to only twenty-six, including some on folk-tales for children (Palsdottir 2000, 228). Silja Adalsteinsdottir's postgraduate thesis, *Thjodfelagsmynd islenskra barnaboka: Athugun a barnabokum islenskra hofunda a arunum 1960-70* (“The Depiction of Society in Icelandic Children's Books: A Study of Children's Books by Icelandic Authors 1960-1970”), published as a book in 1976, is an important model for methodological research into Icelandic children's books, although it covers only a decade

(Adalsteinsdottir 1976). The majority of other work written on Icelandic children's literature, with the exception of Adalsteinsdottir's and Thuridur Johannesdottir's contributions, are written from a pedagogical point of view. For these reasons, a thorough critical study of contemporary Icelandic children's literature is long overdue if children's literature is to enter into Icelandic academia as a subject for literary consideration.

Children's literature in Iceland has suffered as a taught academic subject: the rare courses offered at the University of Iceland are all undergraduate, and only available every other year, if so. Some courses in children's literature have been hosted within the Department of Library and Information Studies, but then the discussion has centred less on literary theory and more on the pedagogical aspects of children's literature. A children's literature course within the library and information services department on International and Comparative Children's Literature has been taught since 1997 by an English lecturer via the Socrates programme. With the exception of that course – and the occasional teaching in the Icelandic department – the University of Iceland does not at the present moment offer much for children's literature researchers. The Iceland University of Education, however, offers future teachers some courses on children's literature, albeit focusing on pedagogics.

Socially, the Icelandic Section of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) has been very active in promoting children's literature affairs by hosting a yearly conference, a number of book introductions and book talks, and publishing two issues a year of *Börn og bækur* ("Children and Books"): a journal on children's literature and children's culture.

For these reasons, it would benefit Icelandic children's literature research – and its public coverage – to draw on the extensive knowledge already accumulated by English researchers in the field. Critical methods introduced and suggested by researchers of

English children's literature could be useful in order to analyse texts from Icelandic children's books. Actually, a number of the theories and approaches listed above would be very intriguing to apply to Icelandic texts. Yet, such applications would have very little meaning in a PhD thesis at an English university or within an international context. As very few Icelandic children's books have been translated into foreign languages, the English reader would in all likelihood not know the texts and little of their background. Herein lies the opportunity for further valuable study by Icelandic scholars, comparing further valuable Icelandic children's books with English children's books. As this thesis demonstrates, employing a range of pertinent cross-disciplinary theory provides a model for comparison, giving rise to the following questions. What is a national children's literature – and what can be gained by such a comparison? Which critical methods should be used? The next two sections focus on answering these questions in turn.

2.4. The Value of Comparison

In principle, the discipline of Comparative Literature is *in toto* a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literatures means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc.

(Tötösi de Zepetnek 1998)

Internationalism and multiculturalism in children's literature has been in debate for at least two decades. In 1987, Margaret Kinnell discussed the pros and cons of comparative children's literature in an article called "Cross-Cultural Futures: Research and Teaching in Comparative Children's Literature," mainly emphasizing the need for more comparative studies (Kinnell 1987). Using samples of 18th and 19th century texts, Kinnell shows how a European dimension in their analysis explains a shift in emphasis in characterisation, and she points out that folklore studies in particular have shown how important comparative historical scholarship is – as they have explored children's stories "across time and space" (Kinnell 1987, 164-5). She claims that although international research societies such as the

IRSCL have provided international forums, these have tended to focus on the researcher's national literature, not the comparison and contrast of children's literature from more than one nation (Kinnell 1987, 166). Finally, Kinnell praises the importance of "research programmes undertaken by students from developing countries in U.K. institutions" (166). I share Kinnell's belief as to the positive outcome of such programmes, which is without a doubt one of the aims of the comparative study undertaken here:

Investigations of this kind are doubly satisfying; as well as developing skills in and awareness of children's literature studies overseas they broaden the horizons of the host institution and sharpen awareness of our own literature, through close analysis and comparison.

(Kinnell 1987, 167)

Kinnell recognizes, however, the problem that there can be obstructions for international research, such as linguistic ability and access to collections.

In spite of Kinnell's encouragement, and in spite of the impending amalgamation of Europe, national literatures seemed, for the most part, to continue to be researched in isolation. In the following year (1988), at the first International Conference of Children's Literature Research: International Resources and Exchange in Munich, Andreas Bode remarked in his opening speech:

When it comes to the most vital questions of our field, for example the elaboration of a common poetics of children's literature or a common sociological perspective, or even a common look at the recognized classics of children's literature, many countries and regions retreat into their own cultural chambers to deliberate and often never re-emerge.

(Bode 1991, 15)

Bode acknowledges, like Kinnell does, that language is a barrier, but claims that the profits of international co-operation make it worth overcoming. In another section of the proceedings of the Munich conference, Birgit Dankert discusses "internationalism" in children's literature and, like her colleagues, advocates international co-operation. Dankert states, however, that it may be more convenient to focus on the differences than the similarities between national literatures:

[I]nternationalism in children's literature research is only possible through a research approach attuned to the fundamental cultural dissimilarity of the

individual object culture in its treatment of a phenomenon common to all: namely a special kind of literature for a special phase of human life. This, of course, must never be misconstrued to mean that the children's literature of a given country or a given culture can only be properly analyzed by people from within that country or culture. On the contrary, there are important examples, both in the past and in recent years, of superior analysis of one country's authors and illustrators by foreign observers.

(Dankert 1991, 25)

Dankert makes a point there that is particularly pertinent when considering comparative studies: researchers involved in a comparative study between their country and another must try to be objective.

Peter Hunt discusses the influence of our background on our perception of what we read in his contribution to the proceedings of a conference on Cross-Culturalism in Children's Literature in 1987, which he calls "Cross-Culturalism and Inter-Generational Communication in Children's Literature" (Hunt 1988). Hunt takes Arthur Ransome's collections of Russian folk tales as an example, commenting that in such a reading it is questionable whether we have approached any understanding of Russian culture:

We may know differences intellectually, but, even if we feel them through the power of the story, there is no way of telling whether we are feeling the culture, or the conflict or contrast with our own culture. Now that, as stated, may seem unanswerable, and therefore not worth saying, but it makes the point that we consistently underestimate the importance of our cultural heritage in providing cues as to what to feel as how to understand.

(Hunt 1988, 38)

What a researcher has to do is to defamiliarize himself or herself from the text, to make a text "strange". This is a problem known to anthropologists when studying their own culture, as Robert C. Allen points out:

Pioneer ethnographer Alfred Schutz suggested that, in order to understand the implicit assumptions that underlie his or her culture, the investigator has to make that culture "anthropologically strange." That is to say, the anthropologist has to make visible and "objectified" those aspects of everyday life that ordinarily remain unnoticed, unspoken, and taken for granted.

(Allen 1992, 3; Schutz 1964)

In my case, I have therefore looked at Icelandic culture as represented in children's books with a foreigner's eyes, and follow Eric Auerbach's advice: "The man who finds his

country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is as a foreign country is perfect” (Eric Auerbach, as quoted in McGrane 1989, 129). Sometimes the outsider’s view is not well-liked by the insiders, as David Lowenthal – a “foreigner” to English culture like me – points out: “Students at an English university accepted my views on English landscape tastes, a colleague told me, but felt it offensive that an *outsider* had publicly delineated them” (Lowenthal 1998, 231).

An “outsider”, looking to compare and contrast a different culture with his or her own, has four major problems according to Kinnell, Bode, Dankert and Hunt: language, access, and over- or under-familiarity with the cultures in question. These problems are all surmountable for me as a researcher of Icelandic and English culture in children’s books. As stated in the Introduction, Icelandic is my native language and I have studied English literature for eight years at university level, four of them in the United Kingdom. Hence, by reading both literatures in their original language, I do not need to rely on translations and hence minimize the risk of a loss of meaning in translation that Peter Hunt suggests: “It is commonly said that what is lost in translation is not merely tonal; it is the whole cultural substructure which gives meaning to the original text” (Hunt 1988, 38).

Accessibility is no problem at all: I have spent half of the research period in each country, with each culture’s collections of contemporary children’s books within an arm’s reach. The third and fourth problem has been solved – or at least approached – by the same means: by staying in England I have defamiliarized myself from Icelandic culture, while at the same time getting acquainted with the shades and nuances of English culture – through “real life” and children’s books.

2.5. Universals and Dissimilarities

This study is not aimed at finding universal themes in children’s literature by comparing texts from two nations: it would rather endeavour to trace dissimilarities by contrasting

them. There has been an exchange of opinions among scholars involved in children's literature as to which of these options are more desirable, or if there are actually any universal themes at all. Birgit Dankert doubts if international co-operation should focus on universals:

Without nationally structured research, there can be no international research. But without its international linkage, children's literature research must remain, despite all theoretical sophistication, provincial. As a subject of scientific inquiry, children's literature can be described adequately only in connection with the culture-specific conditions of its creation and consumption. But this concept can and must be studied worldwide.

(Dankert 1991, 29)

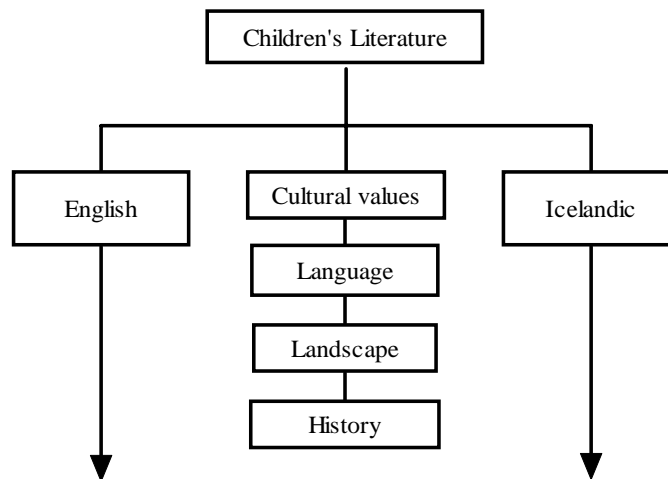
Peter Hunt discusses Dankert's comments in his introduction to a theme called "Internationalism" in *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*, summing up her observations:

Dankert's view was that in the long term, children's literature – and especially its librarians – should emulate the sciences in establishing reliable international databases and information links, rather than making premature judgements about universals.

(Hunt 1992, 112)

Hunt states, however, that some themes are universal – for example psychological insights – and he refers to Brian Alderson's observations on the relationship between the oral tradition and literary derivatives, which are also universal.

There are, then, certain universal themes in children's literature the world over: it concerns itself with the psychological problems of growing up, of an individual's attempts to become a part of a bigger picture and finding a place in the world. This would be the constant, the thread that ties together international children's literature. If this idea is paralleled with Vladimir Propp's proposal about the basic morphologies of the folktale, I would argue that there is a "morphology" of children's literature: that there may be an underlying narrative in most children's literature across the world, consisting of various basic narratemes, or series of actions. The choice and presentation of narratemes depend on, or are affected by, four major factors: cultural values, language, landscape and history:



Maria Nikolajeva speculates on what makes one national children's literature different from another in *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic*, and comes to a similar conclusion, adding some more elements:

With the retrospective approach—the most common one—historians of literature judge on the basis of certain criteria that certain texts from the past can be considered to belong to the children's literature of a given nation. These criteria, however, cannot be themes or subjects, not are they ideology, moral and ethical values, or styles since these change too rapidly. Among points of departure we instead find ethnic, linguistic and cultural criteria. Through language, tradition and cultural values, writers identify with a certain culture. Readers recognize texts as their “own” through language, national mentality, “credible” descriptions, and so on.

(Nikolajeva 1996, 20-21)

I agree with Nikolajeva that language, tradition and cultural values are what makes a writer identify with, and write into, a certain national culture. To this I would add landscape, which may belong to what Nikolajeva calls “credible descriptions”, and it also has a part in shaping what she terms “national mentality”. I also agree with her that themes, subjects and styles may be too arbitrary to count as representative of a culture or a nation. However, I do not agree that ideology, moral and ethical values would not be characteristic of a certain nation, given the time frame in which the texts were written (one only has to think about Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, or colonial Britain). I count these elements as relevant parts of my discussion.

Cultural, moral and ethical values, ideology, history, tradition, language and landscape are the factors which determine the essence of the variables; they are what makes one nation's children's literature different from another. My research centres on these issues. Peter Hunt points out that children's literature is a marginalized subject and therefore does not call for traditional literary methods; he suggests that instead of exercising established critical techniques on texts written for children, scholars should "develop techniques suited to them" (Hunt 1991A, 86). In order to do so, I have surveyed previous work that brings together children's literature and cultural studies, as all of the issues listed above are somehow connected with that field, with the intention of establishing a groundwork for my theoretical approach.

2.6. Children's literature, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

Children's literature scholars began to glance in the direction of cultural studies in the late 1980s. Before reviewing the pioneer work in this area and considering what I could gain by the ideas suggested by the scholars involved, I want to view briefly the development of that particular field of combining cultural studies and literature which is termed as New Historicism. Tony Watkins distinguishes *New Historicism* from the old by "a lack of faith in the objectivity of historical study and, instead, an emphasis on the way the past is constructed or invented in the present" (Watkins 1996, 32). New Historicism enabled scholars within literature to increase their scope, widen their horizons, and look to other disciplines, particularly history, for theories to expand and implement their perspectives.

H. Aram Veesser explains in his "Introduction" to *The New Historicism*:

New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives.

(Veesser 1989, ix)

What New Historicism added to former literary theory was, then, a scope that had formerly been exclusive to historical and cultural studies. Here, I have concentrated on the branch of New Historicism which is termed cultural materialism. Jack Lynch defines "a

materialist analysis of culture“ as “an exploration of the influence of material things on cultural phenomena” (Lynch 1999). One of the initiators of cultural materialism, Raymond Williams, has indeed in his works brought together the main topics of my thesis: history, landscape, and national identity. His methods, originally presented in 1958 in *Culture and Society* (Williams 1990), leading to the current position of cultural materialism as defined by Terry Eagleton, are particularly pertinent. Terry Eagleton explains Williams’ notion in *Literary Theory*:

The method was, so Williams himself announced, ‘compatible’ with Marxism; but it took issue with the kind of Marxism which had relegated culture to secondary, ‘superstructural’ status, and resembled the new historicism in its refusal to enforce such hierarchies. It also paralleled the new historicism on taking on board a whole range of topics - notably, sexuality, feminism, ethnic and post-colonial questions - to which Marxist criticism had traditionally given short shrift.

(Eagleton 1995, 199)

Williams’ ideas have had much influence on directing English literary criticism towards cultural studies. Actually, now most English researchers of literature take a historical perspective into account when studying texts, as John Brannigan conveys in *New*

Historicism and Cultural Materialism:

[C]ultural materialism has had a significant effect on the direction of literary studies in Britain so that questions of historical context and political orientation are now routinely asked in the course of encountering and exploring literary texts. Like new historicism, cultural materialism has been successful in displacing traditional humanist and formalist readings of literature with readings which are more in tune with historical and political contexts, and more sensitive to the problems of ensuring the adequate representation of oppressed and marginalised groups in literary and cultural debate.

(Brannigan 1998, 116)

In fact, children’s literature has been considered the literature of an “oppressed and marginalized” group in literary debate. Lissa Paul parallels the situation of women’s and children’s literature: “Both women’s literature and children’s literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities” (Paul 1990, 149). Peter Hunt also calls attention to the similarities between children’s literature and other “peripheral” literatures, such as post-colonial literature and feminist literature (Hunt claims he borrows the term “peripheral” from Hugh Crago; Hunt, 1991A, 88; Crago, 1983).

Although the wave of New Historicism had hit mainstream literature already in the early 1980s, and although it seemed quite suitable for analysing children's literature, it took longer to strike this sub-category. The ideas and suggestions of three of the groundbreakers – Mitzi Myers, Tony Watkins and Ruth Bottigheimer – will be reiterated here in order to evaluate how these could aid in constructing my theoretical framework.

A pioneer in linking children's literature with culture and history is Mitzi Myers, who wrote a review of three books on children's literature in 1988, which she calls "Missed Opportunities and Critical Malpractice: New Historicism and Children's Literature." Myers wonders why none of the three authors have looked at children's books from a New Historicist perspective, claiming:

None of the three really forwards the in-depth primary research the period requires or manifests attention to the culturally specific formal properties of the works categorized, summarized, or dissolved into lists of lessons taught and attitudes toward family, education, or whatever.

(Myers 1988, 41)

Myers goes on to say that the authors of these three books "lack the sophisticated critical awareness that would wed theoretical approach to historical particularity" (Myers 1988, 41). Then she points out the advantages of applying New Historicist theories to children's literature:

A New Historicism of children's literature would *integrate* text and socio-historic context, demonstrating on the one hand how extraliterary cultural formations shape literary discourse and on the other how literary practices are actions that make things happen – by shaping the psychic and moral consciousness of young readers but also by performing many more diverse kinds of cultural work, from satisfying authorial fantasies to legitimating or subverting dominant class and gender ideologies, from meditating social inequalities to propagandizing for causes, from popularizing new knowledges and discoveries to addressing live issues like slavery and the condition of the working class. It would want to know how and why a tale or poem came to say what it does, what the enviroing circumstances were (including the uses a particular sort of children's literature served for its author, its child and adult readers, and its culture), and what kinds of cultural statements and questions the work was responding to.

(Myers 1988, 42)

Myers' suggestions were reiterated and implemented by Tony Watkins, who instituted a comparative project on children's literature and national identity at The University of Reading Centre for International Research in Children's Literature, in an article from 1992: "Cultural Studies, New Historicism and Children's Literature." Watkins discusses how cultural studies can be applied to children's literature and says that the reasons for doing so are mostly drawn from five characteristics of cultural studies. The first reason concerns reality, which according to Watkins "can only be made sense of through cultural systems embedded in history" (Watkins 1992, 175). Watkins quotes J. Fiske, who says: "Truth must always be understood in terms of how it is made, for whom and at what time it is "true." Consciousness is never the product of truth or reality but rather of culture, society and history" (Fiske 1992, 286). The "truth" in children's books must, according to Fiske's assumption, be considered in terms of that it is made by adults, for children, and should always be considered in conjunction with the actual time in history at which it was written. To continue the application of Fiske's hypothesis to children, the child's identity, or consciousness of itself, is a product of the culture the child was born into, the society or community it moves in, and the history of its ancestors, which serves as a background to his or her existence. These are all aspects which I review in my study.

Watkins argues that cultural studies are applicable to children's literature because research based on cultural studies considers struggles for social power, cultural struggles and the division into groups of society, which can be "along lines of race, class, age, and so on, as well as gender" (Watkins 1992, 175). This aspect is relevant to any cultural materialist study – and to mine, as the thesis employs class distinction and the situation of children in society as components for analysis in the construction of my argument. A further characteristic of cultural studies elucidated by Watkins is the employment of ideology as a central concept. As he points out, the term has lost some of its negative connotation with "false consciousness" and gained acceptance as a set of shared values. As such, it is an important element when discussing community and the child's place within the

community, and for that reason, as stated earlier, one section of this thesis is devoted to the discussion of shared values.

A more recent addition to the application of New Historicism and cultural studies to children's literature is Ruth Bottigheimer's "Cultural History and the Meanings of Children's Literature," in which she investigates some areas of New Historicism as applied to children's literature criticism (Bottigheimer 1998). She claims that "New Historicists, for their part, have enriched literary criticism with the inclusion of dramatically telling, closely described examples of historical fact" (Bottigheimer 1998, 203). Bottigheimer uses social and economic history for illuminating problematic aspects of some English and American children's literature texts from the 18th and 19th century, showing how changes in society's attitudes, for example towards religion, economy and "minority" groups (women, children and "natives") are reflected in the texts. Bottigheimer's method of putting history and literature on a parallel line and studying changing attitudes is a paradigm I use for listing the English and Icelandic books in their historical context in the next chapter.

The suggestions that Myers, Watkins and Bottigheimer make are useful to my study in a number of ways, as stated above, but these critical and theoretical positions are mainly used as starting points. The methodological and conceptual approaches of New Historicism and cultural studies are centrally important to this work, and form a theoretical basis for it. In the practical application of New Historicism and cultural materialism, a variety of critical methods are employed for considering literature. J. Dollimore and A. Sinfield, the editors of *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, define cultural materialism in their foreword as "a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis" (Dollimore and Sinfield 1985, vii). These are my main guidelines, but I have also sought some principles of cultural materialism from the field of anthropology, introduced by Marvin Harris

(Harris 1968; 1974; 1979; 1995). Harris believes that anthropology should give causal explanations for the differences and similarities in the thought and behaviour of groups of people. Some of the major elements of Harris' cultural materialist approach, which are employed in my argument, are listed here with a demonstration of how they are pertinent to this study:

1. **Unequal Power Relationships.** Cultural materialism addresses relations of unequal power, between the different kinds of groups, networks, status, and roles, which includes the uneven power relationship between adults and children.
2. **Transmitted values.** I am considering cultural tradition as knowledge handed down i.e. transmitted, from generation to generation, concerning the values, norms, attitudes, and predispositions of a given culture.
3. **Class.** Cultural Materialism is primarily concerned with issues of class, economics, and commodification. Consideration of class is essential to this study, in the dominant position of class structures in English culture, and the seemingly non-existence in Icelandic culture. In this thesis, I refer to three main definitions of class according to cultural materialists: the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and the aristocracy. The proletariat refers to the "lower" or "working classes" and the bourgeoisie to the "middle classes". The aristocracy derives from feudalism and is therefore non-existent in Iceland, but important in the consideration of the English class-structure.
4. **Emic and etic analyses.** As Harris identifies, cultural materialists make a distinction between emic and etic analyses. An emic analysis totally depends on an informant's explanation: it is, in my study, the native's viewpoint as expressed in children's books. The emics of thought, then, is the informant's description about a

native's thought. An etic analysis, on the other hand, does not rely on an informant's description alone (children's books in my case), but on explication provided by many observers using scientific measures. The etics of thought is, then, the observer's explication about a native's thought. In some discussions throughout the thesis, I have considered on one hand what the children's books say, and on the other hand, what observers of the culture have noted. Some of the "observers" may be considered "unreliable", as they are individuals (e.g. Terry Lacy, an American scholar living for many years in Iceland), or conductors of surveys (e.g. Gallup). These I have included for an interesting "observer's" view of the culture. Other observers, for example EVSSG (The European Value Systems Study Group), I consider unquestionably reliable, as the studies are conducted internationally by recognised scholars.

5. **Interaction with the environment.** One of the basic elements of cultural materialism is a socio-cultural adaptation: a human population interacting with its environment. Cultural materialists take into account the material constraints that human existence is subjected to; they come from the need to produce food or shelter and to reproduce population. The changes that the English and Icelandic nations have made to the national landscape are considered here, as well as different representations of landscape.

Exactly how these cultural materialist issues relate to my thesis will be elucidated further as the argument develops, but the next section summarizes previous work in the field of children's literature on man's interaction with the environment, or the issue of landscape.

2.7. Children's Literature and Landscape

As the previous section shows, the upsurge of cultural materialism in the 70s and 80s led literary critics to pay increased attention to culture, history, identity – and landscape. At

the same time, geographers started taking literary narratives into account when discussing place and identity, as Shelagh J. Squire reiterates:

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s, however, and the emergence of humanistic perspectives, that literary depictions of landscapes and places were widely incorporated into geographic analyses.

(Squire 1996, 76)

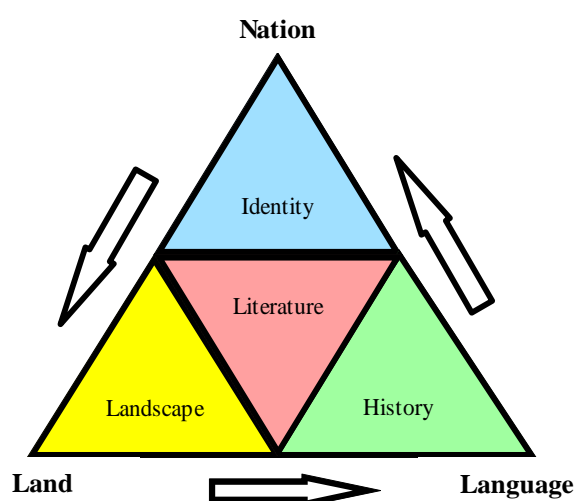
In 1974, geographer Bonnie Loyd wrote an article titled “The changing city landscape in children’s books” (Loyd 1974), and in 1981, geographer Brooker-Gross wrote “Landscape and social values in popular children’s literature: Nancy Drew mysteries” (Brooker-Gross 1981). Shelagh Squire shows the connection between children’s literature texts, cultural identity and landscape in “Landscape, places and geographic spaces: texts of Beatrix Potter as cultural communication,” in which she appeals to her fellow geographers to pay more attention to children’s literature (Squire 1996). Claiming that “literature is a social construct; a vehicle through which both writers and diverse readers negotiate meanings and values for places,” she looks at Beatrix Potter’s stories to “assess how literary images of place may mediate, in practise, certain cultural attitudes and values” (75). Following the tendency of cultural materialists, Squire argues that “all literary texts must be seen as cultural products embedded in the material contexts within which they are created and interpreted” (Squire 1996, 77).

From the literary field, Peter Hunt contributed to the discussion with “Landscapes and Journeys, Metaphors and Maps: The Distinctive Feature of English Fantasy” (Hunt 1987). Using ideas and frameworks from cultural studies and New Historicism related above, Tony Watkins discusses *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900) and *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (1908), to review both the effect of contemporary social changes (industrialism, Darwinism) and the changing concept of landscape as reflected in the two works, in order to “explore the ‘Americanness’ of *The Wizard of Oz* and the ‘Englishness’ of *The Wind in the Willows*” (Watkins 1992, 185). Three other articles by Tony Watkins are also considered here: “Homelands: landscape and identity in children’s

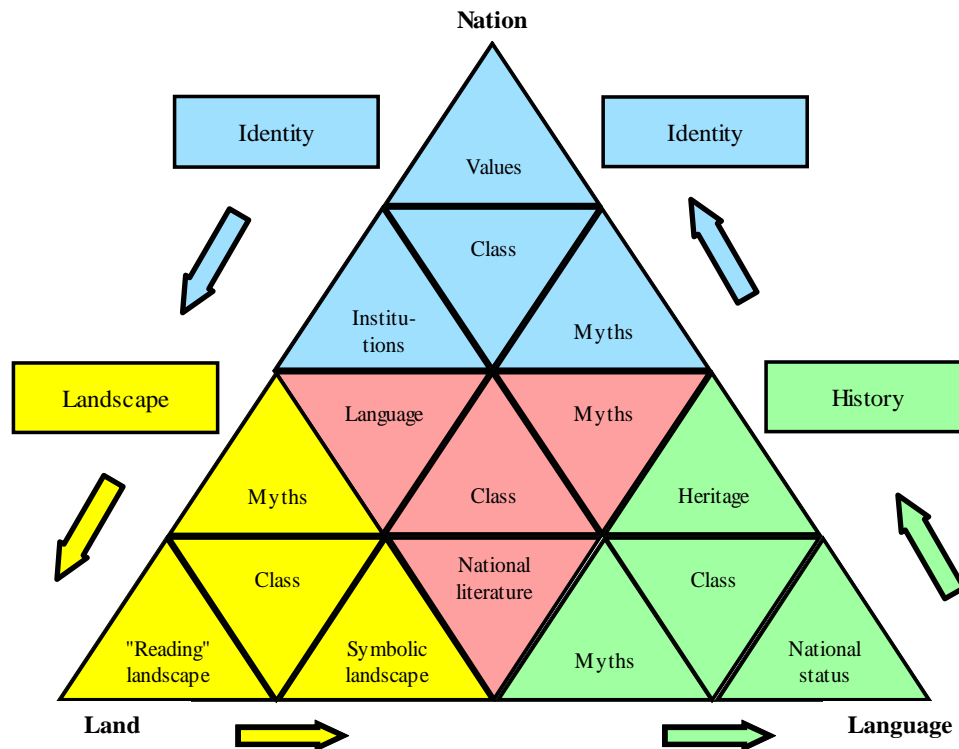
literature” (Watkins 1994), “Reconstructing the Homeland: Loss and Hope in the English Landscape” (Watkins 1995), and “History, Culture and Children's Literature” (Watkins 1996). The most recent input in the discussion is Margaret Meek’s collection of articles, *Children's Literature and National Identity* (Meek 2000).

2.8. Methodology

No similar study has been done to my knowledge, employing English and Icelandic texts for children, so the question remains in which manner the theoretical considerations above should be applied in the study. As stated in the first chapter, the idea of triangulation worked well to illuminate how the keywords of my title (history, landscape, national identity and children’s literature) relate to each other. The basic triangle has already been presented in this manner:



The arrows show the order in which the different topics will be approached in the body of this thesis, ending with history, before making final conclusions about national identity in children’s books. Each of the four coloured triangles could also be divided into a set of smaller triangles, showing the subtopics within them:



It is notable that some of the subtopics are identical, mainly “class” and “myths”. Class affects each one of the topics, as it has an influence on:

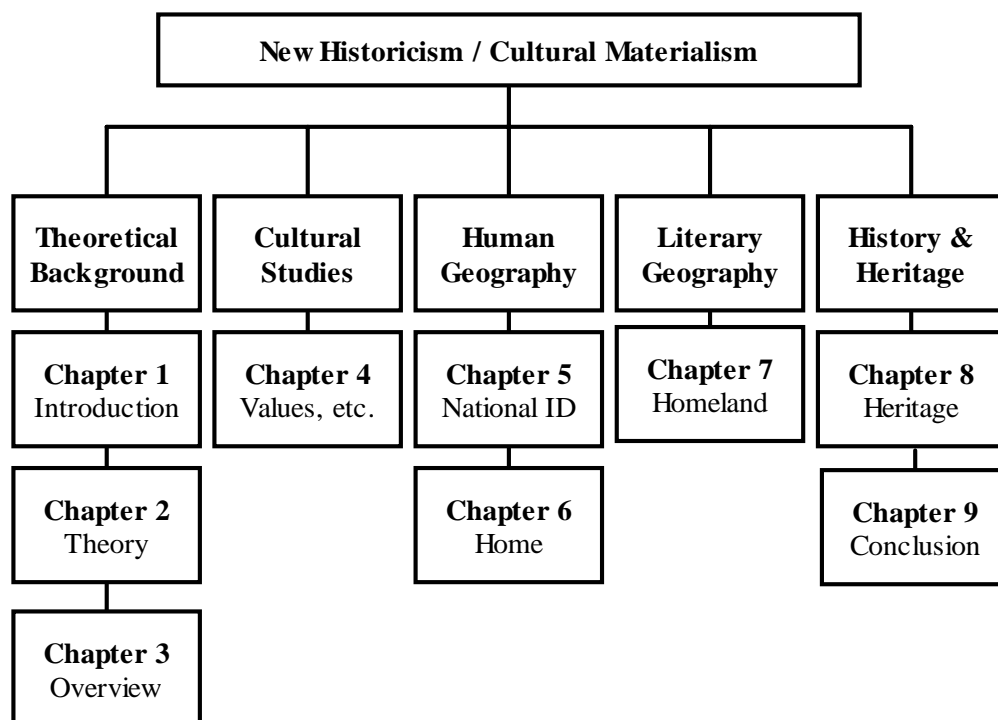
- people’s identity
- the way people use language
- how people interact with landscape, and
- the interpretation of history and heritage

Myth also has an influence on every one the topics, as:

- it shapes people’s outlook, i.e. identity
- it is passed on through language and literature
- it is linked to certain landscapes, and
- it is associated with history

Other subtopics may not be identical within each main topic, and yet they touch on another main topic or topics. Representative, or symbolic, landscapes, for example, are part of the national heritage and can be linked to the “institutions” that uphold society. The same applies to literature. Hence, as the conceptual map on page 13 of the Introduction shows, the weaving together of all these diverse yet matching patches makes the fabric that constitutes national identity.

The organisation of topics into nine chapters has already been explained in the Introduction. The diagram below shows the main theoretical disciplines considered in each chapter. The umbrella heading of cultural materialism means that the whole thesis is written according to the most pertinent major theoretical principles, which have been listed in Section 2.6. After background, theory and the selection of books have been covered, the spotlight moves to the first issue: the transmission of values, norms, attitudes and predispositions. Next comes man's interaction with the environment, which is covered in Chapters 5 through 7. Transmission is again the focus point of Chapter 8, but here it is concerned with how history is transmitted to the young and how heritage is interpreted for them. Cultural materialism involves "borrowing" material from other disciplines and I have had to look towards works from other fields in order to analyse the primary sources. These fields are listed here in sub-headings under the umbrella heading of cultural materialism:



Needless to say in each instance, and to avoid repetition: as this is a comparative study, the children's literature of *both* England and Iceland are considered in the different sections.

Chapter 3 lists the selection of English and Icelandic texts, as well as the reasons for choosing these. In Chapter 4, the discussion moves over to the values of society, ethical and moral, and society's institutions: the family and social care. I do not propose to analyse society's institutions in themselves, or their function, but to see how these institutions – the frameworks that the culture in question has established and maintains to sustain itself – are viewed in children's literature. Chapter 5 enquires into national identity and "the national character".

Chapter 5 starts with a definition of national identity, combined with an analysis of Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities". The positive and negative aspects of patriotism are discussed, with reference to Michael Billig's writings on nationalism, and its reproduction in children's books is reviewed, and the notion of "Englishness" and "being Icelandic" is considered. Landscape is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, as "the three kinds of home". The discussion begins with the idea of mindscapes: that we are conditioned by our culture and surroundings to look at landscape in a certain way, as J. Douglas Porteous and Fred Inglis have argued. The question of how the culture has taught its children to view nature is considered. Next, the symbolic function of landscape in children's books is viewed, with references to writings on literary geography by, for instance, Denis E. Cosgrove and Roland Barthes. Special attention will be paid to the function of woods and mountains. Urbanisation and its effects is then discussed, considering whether it is negatively or positively reflected in children's books, with main reference to Raymond Williams' work on the shifting representation of the country and the city.

History constitutes the third significant effect on national children's literature discussed in this study. The dominating theoretical perspective behind the eighth (and last) chapter is the idea of heritage, mainly as contended by David Lowenthal in his several works on the subject. My discussion begins with a consideration of how the idea of generations having passed through the landscape is represented in children's books. Finally, as the two nations discussed here have very different histories: England has its history as an imperialistic nation, and Iceland was colonized by the Danish for centuries, the impact of these actualities upon the current generation is reviewed from a post-colonial viewpoint.

The thesis combines cultural materialist and post-colonialist literary perspectives, as well as studies in landscape and place, to produce a comparative study, incorporating the material base and historical contexts with literary analysis. I intend to demonstrate that this methodological paradigm functions suitably for a study of this kind, and could be used as a model for surveying the children's literature of other nations to enhance an international understanding of national identity.

CHAPTER 3

THE SELECTED TEXTS IN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

A primary task for the teacher of a new historical criticism must be to disabuse students of the notion that history is what's over and done with; to bring them to understand that they themselves live *in* history, and that they *live* history.
(Montrose 1989, 25).

This is a comparative study of two national literatures, but before the texts can be compared and contrasted, it is pertinent to view them separately in the context of the society from which they derive. Following is a list my selection of 43 English books and 43 Icelandic books in chronological order. With each book, the subject matter and the setting are dealt with, and its importance for my study made clear. If the book has been awarded, or, in some cases, nominated for an award, it is mentioned. Meanwhile, as the books are recorded, they are placed in the social history of the nation – i.e. where major changes in economy or politics may have triggered or influenced the writing of the story, these are cited along the way.

3.1. Choice of Time Period and Category

Selecting a period of time to be covered was relatively uncomplicated. The decision had been made to view “contemporary” children’s literature, which meant that the time range had to go back from the present – preferably at least a couple of decades – and there was just a question of how far back.

Histories of children’s literature, both in England and Iceland, have tended to group children’s literature since 1970 as “contemporary children’s literature”, mainly because of a major turning point in the early 70s. Both countries witnessed a period of prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s, with increased property values, more luxuries, longer holidays, improved education and other advantages of the welfare state. In the beginning of the seventies, however, both the English and the Icelandic society entered a time of unrest as Peter Hollindale and Zena Sutherland illustrate:

After 1970 Britain entered a new period of unease. Problems of race, following the mass immigration of the post-war years, and of class and gender, and of industrial unrest, troubled the country and affected children's lives.
(Hollindale and Sutherland 1995, 253)

These changes were reflected in children's literature, which makes the children's books of both countries of the 1970s and 1980s worthy of note, especially for cultural materialists.

In Iceland, the rising waves of feminism and socialism were finding their way into children's books, which in turn changed from being mainly adventure books – imitating Enid Blyton – into realistic accounts of modern-day, often problematic, childhood and early adulthood. Silja Adalsteinsdottir says in her “Summary” in English at the end of her history on Icelandic Children's Literature, *Islenskar barnabækur 1780-1979*:

Chapter XI deals with Icelandic writers of popular literature for children which dominated the market from the fifties to about 1970. The main types are adventure stories, detective stories, girls' stories, escapist fantasies and stories about the happy days in the country before industrialization.

About 1970 another major change was noticeable. New influence from abroad, particularly from the Scandinavian countries, demanded realistic, down-to-earth stories for children instead of trivial make-believe.

(Adalsteinsdottir 1981, 364)

The early 1970s produced the first book of a writer who was to be one of the most prominent children's book writers of the next two decades. In 1974, Gudrun Helgadottir, published her first book, *Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni* (“Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni”, Helgadottir 1974), which was probably the first Icelandic children's book to realistically portray an urban working-class family – with both parents working outside the home and a grandmother actively involved in politics. This book is one of the cornerstones that mark the beginning of realism in children's books in Iceland.

Aside from starting a new trend towards realism and socialism, the late 60s and early 70s incidentally brought an end to what has been termed as a “golden age” in children's literature in both England and Iceland. Peter Hunt claims that the “second golden age” of British children's books is “conventionally taken as the period 1950-1970” (Hunt 1991B,

114). Peter Hollindale and Zena Sutherland agree, saying that “the 1950s and the 1960s [produced] what is still widely regarded as a second ‘golden age’ of children’s literature,” as during this period several major writers of children’s books came to prominence (Hollindale and Sutherland 1995, 256). They continue to say that in the 1970s, “the golden age, if not extinguished altogether, at any rate fell into twilight” (*ibid*, 257). Although the age of contemporary English children’s literature did not look promising at its outset, it has produced quite a few milestones, now considered “classics”, such as *Watership Down* (Adams 1972), *Goodnight Mister Tom* (Magorian 1981) and *Northern Lights* (Pullman 1995) – not to mention the Harry Potter phenomenon.

Similarly, in Iceland, the 1970s were considered a downhill slide regarding the quality of children’s literature. According to Silja Adalsteinsdottir the “Golden Age” of Icelandic Children’s Literature was approximately from 1933 to 1945, but lasted well into the sixties – that is, it took two decades to die out (Adalsteinsdottir 1999, 18). Still, as in England, the 70s, 80s and 90s have produced a few masterpieces of children’s literature, for instance *Benjamin Dufa* (Erlingsson 1992) and Gudrun Helgadóttir’s children’s books, four of which are covered here.

The period, then, chosen for my study is limited to 1970 to 1999, or the last three decades of the 20th century, and the books selected were almost all originally published during these thirty years. However, a few references are made to children’s books which are considered “classics” and are still widely read and referred to as such, as they are considered particularly reflective of the culture and how it wishes to be preserved. These are, for example, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908). Some books published in the 1960s in both countries are also considered as precedents of the 1970s, for instance John Rowe Townsend’s *Gumble’s Yard* (1961) and Eiríkur Sigurðsson’s *Strakar í Straumey* (“Boys in the Isle of Straum” 1969). A few works have been reprinted again and again, e.g. Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Owl*

Service (1967). Some are briefly referred to in the study while others are discussed at length under different subject headings. The selected books are spread evenly through the thirty-year period, albeit the 1990s (and especially the last few years) are proportionally better covered than other time periods, partly because they are currently under debate.

The type of books chosen also had to be narrowed down; the variety of children's books is so vast that it would be impossible in one thesis to discuss all kinds of children's literature: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, picture books, readers, etc. Picture books, indeed, present a unique field for the discussion of the themes in question, but they would require a different kind of analysis. Readers are designed to train young children in reading and therefore have a specific purpose, which influences the narrative as a construct. Because the thesis deals with the culture of the imagination, non-fiction books were eliminated from the discussion, and so was poetry, because it would need a separate approach. Fiction for older children (10+), however, calls for abstract thinking, often beyond the capacity of younger readers, and therefore the thesis focuses on them. Hence, picture books, books for the younger reader, poetry and non-fiction books are excluded from the argument, which targets on fiction for older children (10+) and young adults.

3.2. Grounds for the Selection: Literary Prizes

Not even the Nobel Prize, nor any other less prestigious prize, has ever been awarded to a children's writer. In order to fight this blatant disregard for children's literature, special prizes for children's writers were established.

(Shavit 1986, 36)

After having decided on a time period and the omission of some types of books, there were still some decisions left to make as regards criteria. For one thing, which rule should regulate the inclusion of some books and the inevitable exclusion of others? I came to the conclusion that the main factor which should govern the selection of books was literary awards. The reason for that has to do with the purpose of the study: I am considering children's literature that reflects the values of society and the various nuances of national identity. Prize-awarded books have been selected by a committee – a jury of peers, so to

say – as books that stand out from the rest, that represent the best of the nation’s children’s literature in a given year. As such, they are an agreed-upon national example of the finest contemporary writing for children.

The English awards that controlled the selection are the Guardian Award, the Carnegie Medal and the Whitbread Children’s Book of the Year.² Some books have been awarded two of these, and some none. The non-awarded books have been included for some given reason – either they are a sequel to a prize-winning book, for example *The Subtle Knife* (1997), a “classic” (e.g. *The Wind in the Willows* from 1908), a “typical” book for a period (*A Pair of Jesus Boots*, 1969), or a well-known book that is very significant for some particular topic, for instance *A Kind of Wild Justice* (1978) for the discussion of the “evil city”. Of course, all the chosen books, awarded or not, are in some way or the other relevant for the study of culture, landscape and history.

It was not as simple and straightforward to use Icelandic children’s books awards as pointers in the selection of Icelandic books, mainly because of the breadth of genre involved in each of them. There are three main prizes for children’s books in Iceland: The Icelandic Children’s Books Prize, The Reykjavik Board of Education Prize and The Icelandic IBBY Award.

The Icelandic Children’s Books Prize is awarded every year for an original manuscript, submitted under a pseudonym. Approximately 30 manuscripts come in each year, both from unknown writers — who have an excellent opportunity to launch a career — and

² **The Guardian Award** is given annually by *The Guardian* for an outstanding work of fiction by a British or Commonwealth author, which was first published in the United Kingdom during the preceding year. **The Carnegie Medal** (by the [British] Library Association, Youth Libraries Group) was established in 1937 and is presented annually to an outstanding book published in the U.K. It was initially limited to English writers whose books were published in England, but since 1969 any book written in English and published first, or concurrently, in the U.K. has been eligible. **The Whitbread Awards** “acknowledge outstanding books of literature not only for the qualities accorded to them by the critics of the day but for popular qualities which make them readable on a wide scale”. The Whitbread Children’s Book of the Year is open to books for children of seven and up, written by a British author. Until 1996, the award was known as the Children’s Novel category of the Whitbread Book of the Year, but from 1996 it has been called The Whitbread Children’s Book of the Year.

writers who have already established a name for them. Seven of the Icelandic books chosen are recipients of the Children's Books Prize. The Reykjavik Board of Education yearly awards one original Icelandic book (published in the previous year) and one translated book. The prize frequently goes to a picture or poetry book, but I have included eight of its recipients. The Icelandic IBBY Association presents its awards each year for a contribution to children's literature and culture and also suggests a book for the IBBY Honour List. Recipients of both are taken into account in my list, nine in all. The total of awarded books amount to less than half of the Icelandic selection, but all the books, awarded or not, as in the English situation, are notable, and widely recognised (in Iceland, that is), and were chosen because of their relativity for the discussion of culture, landscape and history, and their significance as possible factors in establishing and maintaining national identity.

3.3. The Quantity of Children's Books Covered

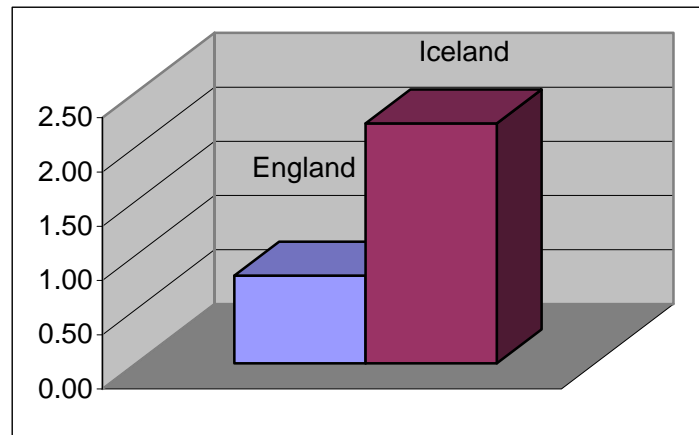
Curbing the number of original texts proved absolutely essential at the outset of this study. It is recognized that the publication output of English children's books is vast: more and more children's books have been published each year. In 1971, at the commencement of the era in question, 2,001 titles were published in Britain, and in 1975 the number had risen to 2,688 (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 289). The publication output has kept increasing, with 5,879 titles in 1990, booming to 9,043 titles in 1999, according to The Publishers Association of UK's website information (Book Trade Yearbook 2000).

The Icelandic situation in children's books publishing is immensely different – the market is so much smaller. The quantity of published original Icelandic children's books seemed to be diminishing in the beginning of the 1970s, adverse to what was happening in Britain. They were 33 in 1970 and dropped to 23 in 1975. After that, the quantity went up again, following the trend in Britain, up to 60 in 1990 (with a drop to 35 in 1994), and 62 in 1998. Out of approximately 150 published Icelandic children's books on average per

year, only around 50 are originally written in the Icelandic language (the others have been translated or reprinted).

Obviously, there is considerable difference between a children's books market of around sixty books per year on the one hand or nine thousand on the other. The most evident reason for this difference is, of course, the disparity in population. According to statistics provided on the Internet by the United Nations, the estimated population figures for Iceland is 281,000 people whereas the United Kingdom counts 58,830,000 (United Nations Statistics Division 2000). The same source shows that 23% of Iceland's population is under the age of fifteen, as opposed to the United Kingdom's 19% (United Nations Statistics Division 2000, separate figures for England are not available). Applying the different percentage figures to the population numbers shows that there should be, in the year 2000, 64,630 people under fifteen in Iceland, and 11,177,700 in the UK.

If the children's books publication figures in both countries for 1999 – that is 9,043 titles in the UK and 143 in Iceland, including translations – are divided by the number of people under fifteen in each country (albeit for the year 2000) we see that more than twice as many children's books titles are being published per capita in Iceland as in the United Kingdom (2.21 in Iceland as opposed to 0.81 in the UK):



Number of published children's book titles per capita of 0-15 year olds in England and Iceland in 1999.

This outcome goes hand in hand with the results of a multi-national survey involving 32 nations, conducted in 1993, which shows that children in Iceland rate among the highest for reading in their spare time (Valgeirsdottir 1993). It also shows that although the target group for children's books in Iceland seems comparatively minute, the children's books publishing industry in Iceland shows no signs of flagging. The calculation reveals that publishers in Iceland are optimistic – although Icelandic children's authors can hardly aspire to riches. None of them, for example, have a literary agent, and the rare writers who rely solely on writing for their income could not do so if not for the Writer's Salary Fund and other governmental funding. British writers, on the other hand, can aspire to sell millions of copies, of which J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, is an outstanding example.

It goes without saying that the children's books publishing industry has much weaker prospects in a country where each published title has a chance of reaching 64 thousand children than in a country with more than 11 million children (that is, in mathematical terms: the sales possibility could be multiplied by 171). What makes marketing easier in Iceland, however, is that the larger bookstores, mainly in Reykjavik and Akureyri, pride themselves in offering every children's book title published each year (and almost all of them are hardcover). However, the largest British bookselling chain, according to Klaus

Flugge, turns down over 90% of all hardcover fiction (Flugge 1994, 211). Therefore, although a children's book has a wider audience to reach in England, the chances of exposure to the possible buyer are better in Iceland.

The fact that two to nine thousand children's books have been published per year in the United Kingdom for the three decades covered here means that the bulk I had to choose material from counts around 150,000 books – to which Icelandic books from the same period, around 1,500, would be added. A limit had to be set somewhere. At the outset I had decided to include 30 books from an equal number of years. As it turned out, some books from before that period had to be considered in order to provide a background, and then some particular book called for another book for points of comparison, so I ended up with choosing forty-three books from each country – which proved fairly controllable.

3.4. Children's Books in their Historical Context

The following two sections list the English and Icelandic children's books set in their historical contexts, since children's books are a product of culture: they are cultural artefacts. As such, their production is influenced by economy and politics, the news, the elements, the optimism or the gloom currently reigning in the society that creates them. I agree with Jeremy Hawthorn, who says in *Cunning Passages*: "Texts are not . . . ever completely independent of time and place" (Hawthorn 1996, 11). Even the emergence of children's literature as a genre was a result of economical and political action, as Jeffrey Richards argues:

Juvenile literature emerged in response to three developments: the discovery of adolescence as a distinctive phase in human life, technological advances facilitating the mass production of books and the Forster Education Act (1870) which established free elementary schools in Britain and paved the way for compulsory universal education, signalling to enterprising publishers the creation of a huge potential new market.

(Richards 1992, 2)

A miners' strike, lack of employment, increased crime rates, inner city revolts, reports on homeless people, the threat of war, floods, earthquakes, an archaeological find, a royal

wedding or a new government: any factor affecting the lives of individuals within the society can influence the writing of a children's book.

Thus, the writer's selection of subject matter and her or his characterization can tell us something. The characters' actions and reactions, their outlook on life and the environment, reflect the values of the author and her or his community. Changes in the environment, caused by forces of man or nature: urbanisation or landslides, the testing of atomic bombs or the disappearance of woods, can affect her or his preference of setting. The choice of subject, characters and setting could, then, reveal how such changes affect the society in which the author resides. His or her choice of narrative technique, or subversion of conventional technique, can also be revealing, as Dennis Butts points out:

Sometimes, indeed, the narrative conventions by which genres have been traditionally structured are subverted in a way which may help the reader to see how a writer or a writer's society handle or even conceal a problem within that society. In many realistic stories of hardship and poverty, success comes to the hero or heroine at the end, not simply through the industry and piety recommended by the author, but through the unexpected intervention of a 'Fairy Godmother', in the person of a wealthy and philanthropic outsider . . . Thus a *realistic* story's reversion to a *romantic* story's formula at a critical moment may expose an unselfconscious awareness of a society's difficulties.

(Butts 1992, xii-xiii)

But even the stories that are not "realistic" – fantasies or time travel books – tell the reader something about the author's outlook, which is shaped by the society that nurtured her or him, as Butts also emphasizes: "Studies of a subgenre of children's literature may disclose, for instance, not only the way a society operates, but the way it would like to be perceived operating" (Butts 1992, xii). A time travel or futuristic book written in the 1960s, set in 2001, may for instance reveal the nuclear-associated fears of the sixties, about a post-holocaust world, devoid of love, family, and the beauty of nature; it may reveal what the people of the 1960s valued the most and what they were afraid of losing.

The relationship between text and place or events is obviously gaining recognition within children's literature. As an example, at the end of *Children's Literature: an Illustrated History*, edited by Peter Hunt, there is a chronological list of noteworthy children's books,

which at the same time shows some major historical events in the social history of England – although it does not associate particular books with the events (Hunt 1995). The listing includes, for example, the 1982 Falklands War, which revived the reality of war for the English and inspired, for instance, *The Tin Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* (Briggs, 1984; not discussed here because it is a picture book). It also mentions the 1984 miner's strike in Britain, which could have influenced the writing of *The Nature of the Beast* (Howker 1985). And in Iceland, the 1973 eruption of a volcano in the Westman Islands brought two children's books on children barely escaping the island, and the 1998 return of the whale Keiko – star of the *Free Willy* movies – generated at least three whale stories.

The influence of historical events on children's books' writing is not always so direct and obvious: frequently the association must be deductive reasoning on behalf of the critic. This happens, for example, in fantasies, where animals can act out allegorically a revolt against the authorities. Indirect forces could, for instance, be the influence of the Falklands War on the English national spirit – bringing the nation closer together (as wars tend to do), and the British Royal Wedding of 1981, having a similar effect and reviving the nation's trust in the monarchy. Another reason for including historical events is to see the ebb and flow of national identity detectable in children's books in accordance with those events. A present event, an archaeological find or the threat of war, can change our outlook on former historical events, compelling us to view them in a new light. An understanding of such interaction is fundamental to New Historicism. Louis A. Montrose says about the practice of a new historical criticism:

It also necessitates efforts to historicize the present as well as the past, and to historicize the dialectic between them—those reciprocal historical pressures by which the past has shaped the present and the present reshapes the past. In brief, to speak today of an historical criticism must be to recognize that not only the poet but also the critic exist in history.

(Montrose 1989, 24)

As a critic, or researcher, I am situated at a certain point in history, viewing writing from another moment in history, sometimes about events that took place in yet another time in history. There is a lot of distortion involved, but the distortion itself is important – even more important, in my case, than the original event. As an example, the late 1970s and early 1980s rumour that nuclear weapons were stored in the American NATO-base in Keflavik, Iceland, reinforced the post-war hostility towards the American “occupiers”, which had gradually been subsiding – and may have turned people’s mind back to the British occupation of 1940, memorialised in Gudrun Helgadóttir’s trilogy (1983, 1986, 1987) and Andres Indridason’s *Manndómur* (1990). Thus, it is obvious that children’s literature can hardly be separated from the place and time in which it was produced, whatever its subject may be.

3.5. The Selection of English Children’s Books

The total number of English children’s books selected for the study is forty-three books, which are listed in chronological order in Appendix II. The English and Icelandic children’s books are listed separately in “Works Cited” at the end of this thesis. This section centres on placing the books in society, with what was happening, both in the world of children’s literature and the world “outside”.

The discussion starts with the 1970s, but first I shall briefly consider what had been taking place in the preceding decade or so – in “the golden age” of children’s literature in England. It was the time in which the fantasy novel really came into flower. Hollindale and Sutherland point out that in 1945-1970:

Again and again in fantasies of the period we see the opposition between the Light and the Dark. . . . In the most celebrated fantasies of the period the contrast was memorably personified in central antagonists: the wizard Cadellin Silverbrow and his evil brother in Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), or Aslan and the White Witch in C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950).

(Hollindale and Sutherland 1995, 274)

These two books are included in my study, not only as examples of former writing for children but because they are important for several aspects of my discussion. As a “classic”, known by almost every English person who has been a child since the 1950s, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) has its place in the English national identity. It has its noble English lion, fighting with the foreign witch, or however one can interpret it, and as a Christian allegorical tale it has its part in reviving the faith in God, which might have been dwindling in a post-war nuclear age. Moreover, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is based on Arthurian legend, like *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (Garner 1960) – and my study involves the part that past history and legend has in present writing for children. What makes the *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* even more important for me is the fact that it is so profoundly welded into English landscape. These two books have one more factor in common: the dark, the cold, and the north represent evil. The White Witch has turned Narnia into a place of eternal winter, and at the end of Garner’s *Brisingamen*, fimbulwinter is moving in from the north, threatening England. It is interesting to compare these with literature from a country in the north, where winter seems eternal, where it is dark and cold for months on end – and yet (or, perhaps, for that reason), evil is not represented by the cold, nor does it come from the north.

Another notable book by Alan Garner from the sixties relevant to this thesis is *The Owl Service* (Garner 1967), which was awarded the Carnegie Medal in 1967 and the 1968 Guardian Award. John Rowe Townsend says of it: “The theme is characteristic of Garner: the irruption of old legend into modern life” (Townsend 1971, 113). The main reason for including it here is exactly that: it makes legend a part of modern life, which many Icelandic writers for children have chosen to do. It is also notable from a post-colonial point of view, because of the tension between England and Wales. Moreover, just like *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (Garner 1960), it is thoroughly bonded with the setting, and therefore important for my landscape discussion.

Blending together fantasy, reality and history, these and other stories that were produced in the golden era of 1945-1970, prepared readers for a new genre, as Hollindale and Sutherland claim when discussing the period:

By the end of this quarter-century . . . history, fantasy, and science fiction had merged to create a new and powerful composite genre which was to form the core achievement of the teenage novel on both sides of the Atlantic.

(Hollindale and Sutherland 1995, 273)

The sixties were also a good time for the historical novel, and I have included one of these, set in a distant landscape in a distant time – in ancient Egypt, Rosemary Harris' *The Moon in the Cloud* (1968), which was awarded the 1968 Carnegie Medal. Another historical novel, Peter Dickinson's *Tulku* (1979), Whitbread Children's Book of the Year and winner of the 1979 Carnegie Medal, is set in China at the time of the Boxer rebellion. It is a complex story, reflecting the increasing identity conflict of the 1970s – the quest for the inner self. Watkins and Sutherland say about that conflict:

The question of 'identity' became a crucial one during the period [i.e. the 1970s]: confusion over national identity, sexual identity, and ethnic identity was often focused on what were perceived as the 'problems' of growing up, particularly during the period of adolescence, and how these were to be represented in literature.

(Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 302)

These "problems" were nowhere as visible as in the realistic stories of the sixties and seventies (which I will turn to shortly), but some writers of fantasy and historical novels have also masterfully portrayed modern problems. Felicity Hughes claims: "In fact the acclaimed writers of the 'new realism' have a long way to go before they can deal with the range of sexual feelings including jealousy, possessiveness, despair and the desire for liberation that Alan Garner dealt with in *The Owl Service* (1967) by using fantasy" (Hughes 1990, 85). The historical novel is also a form that allows for "problem handling", as Watkins and Sutherland point out:

Leon Garfield . . . has argued that, for most of his novels, the eighteenth-century setting is more of a locality than a time, in which he can represent quite contemporary characters more vividly than he could otherwise: thus his 'historical

romances' are not attempts to escape from contemporary life, but attempts 'to view certain aspects of it more clearly and with less clutter'.
(Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 296)

Watkins and Sutherland go on to say that Garfield's "novels represent, in fiction, our own contemporary ideological uncertainties about belief and value" (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 296). I have included Leon Garfield's *John Diamond* (1980), a Whitbread Book of the Year, for several reasons: mostly because it describes a young man's quest for identity, for values, but also because it is important for the discussion of the polarities of country and city.

Realism as a genre was budding in the 1960s and flowered in the 1970s. Novels of the sixties began to portray working-class children and foreshadowed the multi-cultural world rendered in realistic children's books of the seventies. I have picked two of these, *Gumble's Yard* by John Rowe Townsend (1961) and Sylvia Sherry's *A Pair of Jesus Boots* (1969), set in derelict parts of Manchester and Liverpool. Both of them are most pertinent when considering the question of the city and the country, or the representation of the "evil" city. They paved the way for books like Bernard Ashley's *A Kind of Wild Justice* (Ashley 1978) – also included in the study – whose main character, London East-Enders Ronnie Webster, portrays the same kind of self-reliance as Kevin (age 13) and Sandra (age 12) in *Gumble's Yard* (who are abandoned by their parents) and 13-year-old Rocky in *A Pair of Jesus Boots*. All these children have a reckless mother and a "weak" father (or none present), and they have to find resources by themselves to cope with a crisis and survive in the jungle of the inner city.

These three novels show the huge change in attitudes that took place in literature and literary discussion in the sixties and seventies: gender, race and class were no longer automatically assumed to be of a given order – these issues were now questioned and probed. In a review of children's books of the 1970s, Elaine Moss imagines a researcher in 2001 looking at their background to see the changes in society, saying:

The researcher would discover that the children's novel was only slowly beginning to reflect the multi-cultural nation that he remembered from his own schooldays. He would observe that, though the British tradition in fantasy literature was being maintained by authors like Penelope Lively and Diana Wynne Jones, children's fiction was being stretched to envelop contemporary situations that cut across class and colour.

(Moss 1980, 62-63)

One of the novels that represent this multi-cultural society is *The Diddakoi* (1972) by Rumer Godden, a Whitbread Book of the Year, which shows the conflict between a gypsy girl, Kizzy, and the "English" society she is forced to join. The story poses the young traveller girl and her cultural identity against the English national culture, which is based on very different values. Although Kizzy is born and bred in England, she has never been part of English culture: she is English, but she has no claim to English heritage – it belongs to people who are settled in the English landscape, not those who travel through it.

The natural bonding between Englishness, landscape, and tradition is almost never as visible as in the animal story. This is exemplified in *Watership Down* by Richard Adams (1972): the story of a group of rabbits driven away from their inherited home to look for a new place in the English landscape to settle down in comfort. The book was awarded both the 1972 Carnegie Medal and the 1973 Guardian Award, although it seems to go against the rising awareness of feminism and multi-culturalism. Tony Watkins and Zena Sutherland say of it:

It is an epic animal adventure story in which rabbits are anthropomorphized with their own history, language, and mythology, but at the same time conform to what is known of rabbit life. The novel is a rich blend of fantasy and realism, combining a striking evocation of the English countryside with traditional, male-dominated ideas of leadership and culture—and its commercial exploitation set a pattern for marketing that is now standard.

(Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 306)

I felt it pertinent to include in the study two other children's books based on the same tradition, about a group of animals firmly placed in the English landscape: a predecessor, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* from 1908, and a successor, W.J. Corbett's

The Song of Pentecost (Corbett 1982), Whitbread Book of the Year. *Wind in the Willows* is, like *Watership Down* (Adams 1972), a prime example of conservative images in landscape, of order in society and politics, as Timothy E. Cook explains when discussing the two:

After all, the animal fantasy novel, a descendant of the venerable talking-animal fable, has been used through the twentieth century for conservative images of the natural order, as we have seen for two English animal fantasies written seventy years apart.

(Cook 1988, 56)

The two novels then, are important for almost all aspects of my study: for a political discussion, for reasons of ideology, national identity, history and landscape. Teamed with *The Song of Pentecost*, they provide a basis for discussion on the effects of urbanisation, as they reflect the progress from idyllic rural, to industrialised rural, and then to full scale urbanisation. In *Wind in the Willows*, the animals are peacefully settled in the rural landscape; in *Watership Down* the rabbits are driven away by farming machinery that threatens to destroy their home; and in *The Song of Pentecost*, the animals are forced to move because their home becomes the rubbish dump for a big city.

These animal stories look back to an England that is disappearing amidst the smog and hassle of the big cities, to a countryside that is gradually being buried in their litter. The list of English children's books in Appendix I shows that of the nine books from 1970-1980, six look back in time, some to WWII (*The Machine-Gunners*, *Carrie's War*), some further back (*Red Shift*, *Tulku*, *John Diamond*), and one glorifies a disappearing landscape (*Watership Down*). Other Whitbread, Guardian and Carnegie medal winners from this period (though not discussed in my thesis) that are set in the past include K. M. Peyton's trilogy, *The Flambards* (*Flambards*, *The Edge of the Cloud*, *Flambards in Summer*, 1967-1969, awarded in 1970), Leon Garfield's *The God Beneath the Sea* (1970), Gillian Avery's *A Likely Lad* (1971), Barbara Willard's *The Iron Lily* (1973), Winifred Cawley's *Gran at Coalgate* (1974), Penelope Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976), Peter Dickinson's *The Blue Hawk* (1976), David Rees's *The Exeter Blitz* (1978), Andrew Davies's *Conrad's*

War (1978) and Peter Dickinson's *City of Gold* (1980). Award committees in the 70s were seemingly impressed with the fact that the nation's finest writers for children were digging into the national history for material and re-interpreting it for the nation's youth.

Why did children's literature take this turn towards the past? For one, lack of faith in the future can make us nostalgic, as Patrick Wright points out in *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*:

More strongly still, we turn to the past when the future seems unattainable or 'utopian' in the wholly negative sense of the word – something that cannot be extrapolated from the present. Many people have commented in the recent years on the failure of confidence in Western societies, and the British experience would certainly seem to corroborate this.

(Wright 1985, 166)

With the 1970s threat of nuclear war hovering over the world and the Cold War raging, it was not surprising that writers for children turned their heads nostalgically to the past. And perhaps it was the right time to recollect the realities of war for a new and upcoming generation. By the 1970s, the wounds of World War II had started to heal: it was no longer a delicate subject, and by that time the children who had experienced war had grown up and were now writing about it, as Hollindale and Sutherland point out: "Most of the best war novels, such as Robert Westall's *The Machine Gunners* (1975) and Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* (1973) . . . were written by authors who had been children or adolescents during the war years" (Hollindale and Sutherland 1995, 262). *The Machine Gunners*, a 1975 Carnegie Medal winner, and Westall's 1991 Guardian Award winner, *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1990) vigorously evoke the reality of World War II, its violence and destruction, for modern readers. The reality of war and how it affects children is also summoned up in stories of WWII evacuees, as in Nina Bawden's, *Carrie's War* (1973) and Michelle Magorian's 1982 Guardian Award Winner *Goodnight Mister Tom* (1981). The former one tells the story of Carrie and her brother Nick who are sent to a Welsh mining town to get away from the German's bombing. It is, like other war stories, relevant in comparison with Icelandic stories set during the WWII, where war never was an

immediate reality, but still affected the nation in a number of ways. It is also representative of a new trend, as Lissa Paul articulates:

In the genealogy of children's literature I think of *Carrie's War* as a transitional text. It marks a transition from the cosy adventures of children on their own (in the Nesbit tradition), to the complex family structures and social problems of contemporary Young Adult fiction (in the Jan Mark tradition).

(Paul 1998, 58)

There is also more than one motive for including the other evacuee novel discussed here, Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mister Tom* from 1990: the touching story of sickly Willie Beech who is sent to old Tom Oakley to escape from London. The two form a special bond, and in the end Mr. Oakley adopts young Willie. The novel has a significant meaning for my discussion of landscape, and the passing of generations, which is reflected in the fact that the old man's cottage stands on the edge of a cemetery, where his wife and child are buried.

One more novel from the 1970s which evokes ghosts from the past is Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1973), which supports the idea that people are made up of layers of past memories, and that these are tied to a particular landscape. The novel shifts between three time zones, Roman, English Civil War and present day, but the setting is the same: a hill in Cheshire called Mow Cop. As in so many Icelandic stories, an ancient object – in this case a stone axe head – bonds together the present and the past. Watkins and Sutherland say that "the novel suggests that all time exists at once: Romain Britain and the My-Lai massacre are now" (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 310). The novel is therefore significant for supporting my argument that the footsteps of our ancestors, who have trodden on the soil on which we tread, amalgamate into a common memory which we call our national identity. Identity stemming from place is also a theme surveyed in Nina Bawden's *The Peppermint Pig* (1975), which won the 1976 Guardian Award. Watkins and Sutherland say:

The Peppermint Pig (1975), the simple narrative of a year in the life of an Edwardian family whose father has gone off to America to seek his fortune,

embodies what one critic has described as ‘the painful relationship of happiness, hope and the inexorable passing of time.’

(Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 303)³

The mother takes her four children to live in Norfolk, where her husband is from, and there the young meet their ancestors through treading on the same ground and by visiting their graves. Landscape, again, has a significant part in tying together the generations.

The post-war years, the 1960s and the early 1970s had been the years of governments which introduced benefits, income support, pensions and sickness provision, improved the education system and set up the NHS. John Brannigan recapitulates:

Successive Labour and Conservative governments throughout the post-war period maintained the welfare state, although the 1970s saw some changes to the system, but the rise of the New Right in Britain put an end to the consensus on welfare politics. After Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, her Conservative government applied various financial and legal constraints on the welfare, health, and education services, diminishing the provision of pensions and benefits, forcing the health service to levy charges for an increasing number of its services, and implementing a wave of financial cuts on schools, universities, hospitals and local government. Thatcherism represented for the cultural materialists and Marxists in Britain the final nail in the coffin of consensus politics. What had begun with politicians in the late 1940s promising an end to poverty, ended in the 1980s when the gap between the rich and the poor in Britain widened, and unemployment reached new and dismal heights. Thatcherism is, therefore, the dominant political agenda to which cultural materialists are reacting.

(Brannigan 1998, 117, note no. 2)

The financial cuts and the breakdown of the welfare system soon found a way into children’s books, which increasingly began to reflect the self-doubts of modern society, and the questioning of authority. Protagonists move in an uncertain world, they are confused, searching for an identity, some handle to hang onto while the wheels of the world spin on. Patrick Wright describes this idea of modernity thus: “Everything that may have been stable is caught up into transformation and development; all that is solid, as Marshall Berman has recently reminded us with such brilliance, melts into air” (Berman 1983; Wright 1985, 16). The existential crisis is reflected in Aidan Chambers *Dance on my Grave* (1982), whose protagonist, Henry Spurling Robinson, or Hal, is searching for

³ The critic Watkins and Sutherland quote is not specified.

his sexual identity. The world literally hurtles by him: he lives in Southend, a town through which people move fast: “a town whose trade was trippers” (Chambers 1982, 9). The landscape itself, the Southend pier, with its symbolic reference, has a part in his quest. The girl in Berlie Doherty’s Carnegie Medal winner, *Dear Nobody* (1991) also has a problem with getting a grip on a world that is moving too fast: writing letters helps her slow the pace down and make sense of her life after discovering she may be pregnant. These two books deal with controversial issues, homosexuality and teenage pregnancy, and they represent a new genre that has been blossoming since the 70s: the young adult novel.

The actions of Margaret Thatcher’s government had several other effects on English society and English culture. For instance, Thatcher managed to revive the English national identity, which had become a little fractured in the post-colonial years. Patrick Wright says that 1979 was

the year in which Margaret Thatcher started to project her governmental mission not in terms of the merely political (and therefore changeable) consensus of liberal democracy but in the transcendent and eternalised measure of an imperial national identity which she alone could secure against the series of indefinite but nonetheless persistent threats which have played that conveniently demonic role in her public rhetoric.

(Wright 1985, 2-3)

In the next years the “threats” were amplified and peaked in 1982 with the Falklands War – which strengthened the English people’s belief in their government and intensified national identity, as Douglas Kellner points out: “When a country is at war or in danger people tend to support their government and pull together” (Kellner 1995, 214). The foreign threat is extremely noticeable in Roald Dahl’s Whitbread Book of the Year 1983, *The Witches*, in which The Grand High Witch, who speaks with a very German accent intends to turn all the children of England into mice (Dahl 1983). These and more implications in the book are discussed in the fifth chapter.

The threats to New Right England and English identity were not only external. Patrick Wright points out that Margaret Thatcher called the striking miners in 1984 “the enemy within” (Wright 1985, 179-180). The miners’ strike may well have provoked Janni Howker’s Whitbread Book of the Year, *The Nature of the Beast* (1985), which, according to Watkins and Sutherland “vividly depicted the despair of unemployment in a contemporary Lancashire mill town, and the beast that stalks the community is as much symbolic as it is real” (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 302). The enemy within are not striking miners in *The Nature of the Beast*: the enemy is unemployment, poverty and other threats to culture and society. Howker’s novel is noteworthy for my study of culture, and of landscape, too, because of the setting in the industrial town. An industrial landscape is also central to Berlie Doherty’s Carnegie Medal winner, *Granny Was a Buffer Girl* (1986), which brings together the history of three generations in Sheffield, where the steel industry modelled the landscape and then, when the industry broke down, remodelled it by negligence.

Children’s books in the 1980s were not only beginning to deal with matters that had formerly been taboo, and with social problems, they were also getting darker, more sinister, more “evil”, if you wish, starting a trend that is still flourishing, with Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. I would argue that this trend, too, was ignited by the consequences of the New Right’s actions, by quoting Pilcher and Wagg in *Thatcher’s Children*, who claim:

[I]n the most memorable political enunciation of the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher declared: ‘There is no such thing as “society”. There are men. And there are women. And there are families.’ The assumed children of these ‘families’ have often appeared in the rhetoric of the New Right to hover between Heaven and Hell. In Heaven, the male head of their nuclear family, doubtless an entrepreneur now liberated from state control and trade union interference, provides them with love, discipline and selective education. In Hell, children are menaced by a gallery of social demons: single mothers, absent fathers, muddle-headed social workers failing to detect abuse, drug pushers, paedophiles, ‘do-gooders’ reluctant to punish young offenders, ‘trendy’ teachers, doctors prescribing contraceptives for young girls, media executives purveying violent and sexually explicit material, and so on.
(Pilcher and Wagg 1996, 2)

A number of protagonists in awarded English children’s books from the 80s and 90s are not the ones that are in Heaven as depicted by Pilcher and Wagg: they are in Hell. This

applies, for example, to Cassy Phelan of Gillian Cross's *Wolf*, the 1990 Carnegie Medal winner, "a complex novel with many layers of meaning which combines an exciting thriller about the IRA with the exploration of the psychological maturation of a 13-year-old girl" (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 302). It also applies to Tulip, one of the central characters in *The Tulip Touch* (1996) – Whitbread Book of the Year and highly commended for the Carnegie Medal – who is, in her Hell, "menaced by a gallery of social demons," to quote Pilcher and Wagg again (above). The little girl appears to be a little devil, and her acts of wickedness are not like childish pranks: they are skin-prickling, hair-raising, bona fide acts of violence.

The idea that a child could be as "evil" as Tulip was not unreal to the English public. Only three years before the book was published, in 1993, two boys, Venables and Thompson, had been found guilty of killing the young James Bulger in Manchester, to the shock of the whole nation. Bob Franklin and Julian Petley studied newspaper reports on the Bulger case and reviewed the impact the coverage had on the English public:

Third, the brutal and hysterical press vilification of Venables and Thompson spilled over into more generalized assertions about childhood. The essentially 'evil' character of these two boys was projected by press reports onto children in general and the whole notion of childhood, thus metamorphosing the traditional social construct of childhood 'innocence' into its opposite.

(Franklin and Petley 1996, 138)

The age of innocence had passed. Children, raised in Hell, were capable of the most brutal acts. And the whole thing was easy to blame on the social system: *The Tulip Touch*, like so many other children's books from this period, criticises social workers for their incompetence and "muddle-headedness". There is a reason for the criticism and distrust of social workers, to be traced back even further than the James Bulger case, to the mid-1980s, when some children in England died as a result of parental or step-parental abuse while the families were involved with social workers. Nigel Parton talks about their deaths and the resulting enquiries in an article he calls "The New Politics of Child Protection":

The child care professionals, particularly social workers, were seen to have failed to protect the children with horrendous consequences. Rather than see the deaths as resulting simply from individual professional incompetencies they were usually

seen as particular instances of the current state of policy, practice knowledge and skills and of the way systems operated and interrelated.

(Parton 1996, 47)

Consequently, the whole social system was questioned, with particular regard to its “victims”: children, senior citizens, and the homeless. Such criticism prevails, for instance, in Melvin Burgess’s *An Angel for May* (Burgess 1992), where an old “bag lady” acts as a medium to lead 11-year-old Tam to the past, to the time of WWII. Tam gets interested in her circumstances, and like Natalie in *The Tulip Touch*, cannot understand why the social services are so inept.

The homelessness situation is also considered in two Carnegie Medal winners from the 1990s about young people that have abandoned “normal” society and taken to the streets: Robert Swindells’s *Stone Cold* (Swindells 1993) and Melvin Burgess, *Junk* (Burgess 1996), which also won the 1997 Guardian Award. These two books mirror what was happening in television in the United States in the 1990s, as recollected by Douglas Kellner in an article called “Media Culture: Cultural studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern”:

Indeed, during the Reaganite 1980s, programs like *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Life Styles of the Rich and Famous* celebrated wealth and affluence. This dream has been punctured by the reality of everyday life in a downsliding economy, and so a large television audience is attracted to programs that articulate their own frustration and anger in experiencing downward mobility and a sense of no future. Hence, the popularity of new “loser television,” including *The Simpsons*, *Roseanne*, and *Beavis and Butt-head*.

(Kellner 1995, 149)

Stone Cold and *Junk* are “loser” stories: the “downward mobility” of the characters brings them to rock bottom. The character of *Stone Cold* decides to move from home and ends up begging on the streets of London, and Gemma and Tar in *Junk* are also squatters, getting caught in the web of drugs. Homelessness is a cultural phenomenon in England, but almost unknown in Iceland, where nobody is ever seen begging on the streets, and therefore these books are central for comparison with Icelandic children’s books on “social problems”.

A different kind of criticism of authority expresses itself in the so-called conspiracy theory: that we are being fed with lies, that we live contentedly in a farce in which no-one can tell what is true and what is false. Such critique is to be found in Geraldine McCaughrean's *Pack of Lies* (1988), which won both the 1988 Carnegie Medal and the 1989 Guardian Award, Sylvia Waugh's *The Mennyns* (1993), and McCaughrean's *Forever X* (1997), shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal. In the first, a young girl can never tell who the strange visitor, Berkshire, is, and she is persistently questioning the stories he tells: wondering whether they are "true" or not. *The Mennyns* (1993) portrays a family of rag dolls, which pretend they are human and have managed to maintain this front for forty years. *Forever X* (1997) derives its name from a sign outside a guesthouse, from which the "-mas" has fallen off. The proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Partridge, celebrate Christmas all year round, for people who have for some reason not been able to celebrate it in December. It is, like *Pack of Lies* and *The Mennyns*, worthy of note for a discussion of ideology, but also for the chapter on heritage, as the Partridges decide in the end to change the theme to "Forever England".

"Forever England" is unquestionably the theme of Michael Morpurgo's *The Butterfly Lion* (1996) – a retreat into the romanticism of Empire. The story revolves around a white lion, which is a symbol for Englishness, and it is worthy to note that it is an endangered species. Another book on an endangered species is Melvin Burgess' *The Cry of the Wolf* (1990). A young boy encounters the last pack of wolves in England, which is hunted by "the Hunter" – who is obviously an "outsider", a foreigner – until there is only one wolf left. Yet one hunted animal in children's books is the old dog in Henrietta Branford's historical novel, *Fire, Bed and Bone* (1997), a Guardian Award winner and highly commended for the Carnegie Medal. The following year's Carnegie Medal winner, David Almond's *Skellig* (1998), also portrays an endangered species, seemingly an Archaeopteryx – the dinosaur that flew – living in a stinking and rickety garage in the weedy and tangled garden of the

house of a much troubled family. All these four books are exceptionally notable for their association of feelings and environment, and the correlation between national identity and landscape.

The correlation between identity and landscape is masterfully portrayed by Lesley Howarth in *MapHead* (1995), again a Guardian Award winner and highly commended for the Carnegie Medal. The main character, Boothe, or MapHead, can see ghosts and secrets in the landscape: he has an extraordinary ability to “read” landscape, which makes the book indispensable for this study. Moreover, MapHead’s attempts to fit into English culture are also highly relevant for cultural interpretation.

An individual’s attempts to fit into an unknown or foreign culture are rarely as well displayed as in novels involving time or space travel; we are never as much aware of our own cultural inhabitations as when thrown into an outlandish environment. This happens in some fantasies from the 1980s and 1990s, the first of which studied here is Hugh Scott’s *Why Weeps the Brogan?* (1989), Whitbread Book of the Year. Saxon and her brother Gilbert are in a post-holocaust world in the Museum of London, among Egyptian mummies from 1600 BC and Scottish scissors from the 18th century: they are literally buried in heritage. Although they have had to learn to get by like prehistoric man, finding weapons to suit their needs and giving names to strange things in their environment (e.g. the Brogan), they have not forgotten their English cultural identity when addressing each other with well-mannered phrases like “You may make me coffee” and “You may spread jam on my bread.”

Lyra Belacqua, the protagonist of Carnegie Medal and Guardian Award winner *Northern Lights* (1995) – the first book of Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy – must also learn to get by in an alien environment. Lyra is raised in the safe surroundings of an Oxford college, rich in cultural history, and then suddenly hurtled to London, a hectic city,

from there to the far North, and from there, in the second book of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* (Pullman 1997), into an alien world. A cultural relocation also takes place in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), highly commended for the Carnegie Medal and shortlisted for the Guardian Award. Harry Potter, contrary to Lyra's experience, gets transported from our chaotic world into a place rich in tradition and cultural history: The Hogwarts School of Magic, where he feels as extraterrestrial as Lyra does in our world.

Travel in time, like travel in space, exposes the depth of cultural identity and can lead to all kinds of cultural conflicts, as the latest children's book studied here, Susan Price's Guardian Award winner, *The Sterkarm Handshake* (1998), shows. A team of scientists have found a way to travel through time to early England, allowing them to plunder the past and re-enact what England did during its colonial era. The conflict is very critical of English contemporary culture and sharply explores the values of modern society. As such, it is valuable for contrasting with Icelandic children's books, which seem to tread much more delicately on the grounds of Icelandic culture.

3.6. The Selection of Icelandic Children's Books

A total of 43 Icelandic children's books were chosen for this study. As with their English counterparts, they are listed here in association with some events in Icelandic history which are relevant for the following discussion of children's books and society. It may strike the reader that whereas the English list includes two classics, *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame 1908), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis 1950) and five books published in the 1960s, the Icelandic list counts only one book published before the 1970s: Eiríkur Sigurdsson's *Strakar í Straumey* ("Boys in the Isle of Straum" 1969). The English classics were included because they are still widely read and taught in English schools and are therefore still affecting the national identity of English children.

In Iceland, however, it is hard to point at one or two nationally renowned children's books from before 1970 that have been canonized as "classics" – as, for example, the two books above in England.⁴ There are a number of books that certainly are "classics": Iceland has its great children's books writers, which belonged to the "Golden Age" of children's literature, for instance Stefan Jonsson (1905-1966) and Ragnheidur Jonsdottir (1895-1967).⁵ They wrote books that are among the best writing in the history of Icelandic literature in general. Jonsson's books are set in rural areas, but they are still very realistic: instead of a purely idyllic image of the countryside, he portrays poverty and loss as part of everyday reality. The books he wrote mark the beginning of Icelandic children's literature as a separate genre. Jonsdottir's characters also suffer difficulties, such as unemployment, and they experience and question class distinction, which is much less noticeable in most other Icelandic children's books. Her books have been republished in the past years, as well as the "Adda"-books by Jenna and Hreidar Stefansson (both born in 1918), and some books by Armann Kr. Einarsson's (b. 1915), who is one of Iceland's most prolific writers for children, with about 40 titles to his name.

Although a number of these books are still widely read and taught, I cannot identify a couple of them that have been chosen as "classics" for all contemporary Icelandic schoolchildren to read as part of their curriculum. There may be various reasons for this, for example the fact that Icelandic children's literature, before 1970, has not been "canonized", as English children's literature has been (although mainstream literature in Iceland has its recognized classics). Still, the last three decades have seen some children's books that are very widely taught as part of the national curriculum, e.g. Gudmundur

⁴ Aldo Scaglione suggests that the name of "the classics" is derived from their selection for use in classes in liberal arts, way back from the sixteenth century. Aldo Scaglione, "Comparative Literature as Cultural History: The Educational and Social Background of Renaissance Literature," in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988, 149).

⁵ Silja Adalsteinsdottir says: "The "Golden Age" of Icelandic children's literature lasted a little over a decade, 1933-1945, but it took two more decades to die out." Silja Adalsteinsdottir, "Íslenskar barnabækur - sögulegt yfirlit," in *Raddir Barnabokanna*, ed. Silja Adalsteinsdottir (Reykjavik: Mál og menning, 1999, 18).

Olafsson's *Emil og Skundi* ("Emil and Skundi" 1986) and Fridrik Erlingsson's much-awarded *Benjamin dufa* ("Benjamin Dove" 1992) – and these are included here. Almost every schoolchild in Iceland knows these "classics" from school reading – or at least from the now popular films.

Silja Adalsteinsdottir points out that the 1950s and the 1960s did not see as many original and complex books as the thirties and the forties did (Adalsteinsdottir 1999, 18). The war brought increased prosperity to the Icelandic public, but there was a shortage of extravagant goods from abroad, and people started to spend more on books. Icelandic children's books writers could not keep up with the demand. As a result, publishers started to look for literature from abroad, which tended to be rather low-brow: romance, mysteries and crime novels. Icelandic children's authors eventually started to emulate these, and particularly after the onrush of Enid Blyton's books in the 1950s and 60s – which were immensely popular in Iceland – they churned out mysteries of the Blyton kind.

The majority of Icelandic children's books in the 1960s, both mysteries and others, are set in a rural environment, romanticizing the old farming community ways – which were actually disappearing by that time. Five of the first six Icelandic books covered here are representative of this idyllic construction of the countryside; they are about boys growing up in a small seaside community, who get to know the facts of life through nature, the giving and taking of the sea, and male bonding. Eiríkur Sigurdsson's *Strakar í Straumey*, or "Boys in the Isle of Straum", carries the subtitle "A Boy's Story" (1969). Two sons of a small town doctor are sent to the Isle of Straum for the summer, where they assist an archaeologist in discovering ruins from the earliest Icelandic settlement – which is relevant to my discussion of heritage. Logi, the 16-year-old protagonist of Gudjon Sveinsson's *Ort rennur aeskublod* ("Young Blood Flows Fast" 1972), also lives in a small town on the coast. The story is, like *Watership Down* (published the same year in England), a tribute to nature, as the first lines of the book reveal:

Where the winters are long, the spring is bright. Then the reign of the long winter is overthrown in a very small land, bordering on the polar circle.

Soon the frost's bondages loosen their grip and a red evening sky promises a bright morning. Life alights in a hollow, a stream washes its banks, lambs wiggle their wondrous scuts and the plover delivers its melodies into the fresh air, drenched with the vapours of pleasure and love; gentle waves give a sea-worn beach a kiss of reconciliation.

This is how spring arrives in Iceland and how it has arrived for thousands of years – but still its arrival always seems a bit of a surprise.

(My transl. Sveinsson 1972, 5)

The book is important because it draws on a popular belief in Icelandic culture: that seamanship provides a young man with an important disciplinary lesson. It also shows how an Icelandic feels when abroad, intimidated by the outside world, which provides an interesting contrast to how English children experience being overseas.

The sea is also a powerful element in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar strond* ("Childhood's Coast" 1973) and *Bjartir dagar* ("Sunny Days" 1976), which are based on his own experiences as a child growing up in a village by the sea in the early 20th century. Both books are important for studying how the sea has shaped people's minds – as a provider which demands human sacrifice. They are also pertinent to the discussion of place and roots, and about folktales and legends. Jonas Jonasson's *Polli, eg og allir hinir* ("Polli, Me, and All the Others" 1973) is also based on the childhood memories of the author in a small village by the sea, just outside Reykjavik (which was later incorporated into the city and bore and bred the writer of this thesis). The story is set in the summer before WWII broke out, and is important both for the sake of Jonasson's comments on the prelude to the war, for the discussion about values, and, again, about seamanship.

These five books are all characteristic of the kind of writing for children which prevailed in Iceland before the age of realism set off in the 1970s. They are also typical of a theme which governed in Icelandic children's books throughout the last century: that of city children being sent to a farm in the country to spend the summer amongst Nature's wonders. As other similar books show, discussed later in the section, this kind of Romanticism did not disappear when realism set in. However, the history of Icelandic

children's literature changed considerably in the beginning of the 1970s when the "Scandinavian wave" – as Silja Adalsteinsdottir calls it – hit the country. Adalsteinsdottir claims that you could describe the subject of the realistic 70s books with two terms: "the everyday and the present" (Adalsteinsdottir 1999, 19). As is obvious from the term quoted above, she traces the influence to the realistic wave that had been sweeping over Scandinavia in the late 1960s and early 70s. Maria Nikolajeva describes the Swedish situation thus:

The 1960s and 1970s in Sweden were years of social engagement in children's literature. The authors began to take up a vast variety of issues that can affect children in society: parents' divorce, alcohol addiction or criminal behavior; the nightmares of school start when teachers fail to understand the child's psychology; the trauma of moving from countryside to large city, with subsequent mobbing by cruel classmates; sibling rivalry; unmarried teenage mothers; and so on.

This was a necessary and understandable reaction to the earlier idyllic children's literature which has sought to protect the young reader from the less attractive aspects of society.

(Nikolajeva 1995, 44)

As my discussion in the section on English books demonstrates, a similar process had been taking place in England. The trend took a little longer to hit Iceland, and it hit with a single book: Gudrun Helgadóttir's *Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni* or "Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni" (1974). This was Helgadóttir's first book, and since then she has written over 20 books. It was probably the first book to show children living in an apartment in the city, with both parents working away from home. Furthermore, no one gets sent to the country for a lesson in Nature's wonders. The twin boys, Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni, have a grandmother actively involved in politics, which is interesting considering that Gudrun Helgadóttir was an MP from 1979-1995.

The first years of the 70s were turbulent years in Iceland's political history. Since World War II, centre-right governments had been in power, with one brief exception from 1956 to 1958. In 1971, a left-wing government was formed, whose foreign policy agenda differed markedly from that of its predecessor. During a humanities conference in Iceland in 2000, one of the speakers, Valur Ingimundarson, made the point that despite a thaw in

U.S.-Soviet relations during the tenure of the left-wing government 1971-1974, the political rhetoric in Iceland regressed to the high points of the cold war in the 50s and 60s:

Again the fundamentals of Icelandic foreign/domestic policies were at stake: the extension of the fishery limits and the British' reactions to it on the one hand, and the U.S. military presence in Iceland its ties to NATO on the other. An acute tension developed between two opposed notions of Iceland's foreign policy: between a continued commitment to "Western integration" (NATO and the U.S.-Icelandic Defence Agreement) and between that of decreased ties with the West on nationalistic grounds and a more forceful support for Third World positions on the basis of perceived shared interests (fishery limit extension and the Cod Wars against the British). For the first time, the fishery dispute and the navy base issue collided, producing a very inflammable mixture in Icelandic politics and seriously threatening Iceland's military relationship with the West.

(My transl., Ingimundarson 2000)

Before going further, these fundamentals of Icelandic politics should be clarified for the English reader. The Icelandic government made a fisheries pact with the British government in 1901. In 1948 the Icelanders resigned from the pact and passed a new law on fishing. They extended the fishing limit to 4 miles in the north in 1950, and for the whole country in 1952. The British issued a landing ban on Icelandic fish, with the result that the Icelanders started selling in the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. The Icelanders extended the limit to 12 miles in 1958, and again the British issued a landing ban – and provided military defence for their fishing boats in Icelandic territory. Iceland, a country which has never has an army or a navy, threatened to resign from NATO if Icelandic Coast Guard vessels were fired at. The fishing limit was extended to 50 miles in 1972 and 200 miles in 1975, with fierce opposition from the British, who again sent a military fleet to protect their fishing boats from Icelandic Coast Guard vessels.⁶

The Cod Wars, albeit without any bloodshed, led, like the Falklands War in Britain, to an upsurge in nationalism in Iceland. They also revived, as Ingimundarson mentions above,

⁶ For more information on the Cod Wars, see Sir Andrew Gilchrist, *Cod Wars and How to Lose Them* (Edinburgh: Q Press, 1978), Albert Jonson, "Tiunda thorskastríðid 1975-1976 ("The Tenth Cod War 1975-1976")," *Saga XIX* (1981), Hannes Jonsson, *Friends in Conflict: The Anglo-Icelandic Cod Wars and the Law of the Sea* (London: C. Hurst Archon Books, 1982), Norman Storey, *What Price Cod? : A Tugmaster's View of the Cod Wars* (Beverly, North Humberside: Hutton Press, 1992). and Gudmundur J. Gudmundsson, "'Thau eru svo eftirsött Íslandsmid...". *Samningavidræður Íslendinga og Bretanna* i Footnote continued on next page.

the opposition to NATO and the American Military Base, and some remains of hostility against the British since their occupation of Iceland in 1940. The British “handed over” Iceland to the U.S., who made a Defence Agreement with Iceland and set up a NATO base in Keflavik. The U.S. base in Keflavik is still there (and appears, for instance, in Bjornsson’s *K/K: Keflavikurdagar/Keflavikurnaetur*, “Keflavik Days, Keflavik Nights”, 1995), whilst the other bases around the country now have been closed down. During the Cold War, the Icelanders became aware of their vulnerable position midway between Washington and Moscow. Because the country has never had an army, the Icelanders half-appreciated the U.S. protection and half-disliked the humiliating position of being under the their protective wing.

Such turbulence in national and international affairs, as discussed earlier, tends to turn a nation’s eyes to the past, to the glorious days of yore. The five children’s books mentioned earlier, published between 1969 and 1973, all romanticized the countryside and the past: three of them were set before WWII, and the other two shortly after the war. All of them glorify the sea – the nation’s most precious asset, coveted by other nations – while at the same time lamenting the human sacrifices the ocean has claimed throughout the centuries. To put it bluntly: it is as if the writers are saying that Iceland has lost so many lives to the sea in return for its treasures that the country has entered into a give-and-take pact with the sea – and therefore the sea around Iceland rightfully belongs to the Icelanders. The fact that the hero in *Strakar i Straumey* (“Boys in the Isle of Straum”, Sigurdsson 1969) saves the lives of some British seamen on Iceland’s coast without any mention of resentment, shows how confident the nation is in its belief. This view is also expounded in Elisabet Thorgeirsdottir’s short story from 1985, “The Sea”, which states how the sea is “closely intertwined with the small town life,” providing enterprise and work:

But the sea is not just a treasure chest from which the fish is taken. The fish that is the basis of Iceland’s prosperity and provides such precious currency after it has passed through many hands and much sweat has been parted with on its behalf.

thorskastridinu 1958-61” or “They Are So Coveted, the Icelandic Fishing Grounds...”: The Negotiations between Iceland and Britain During the Cod War 1958-1961,” *Saga* XXXVII (1999).

The sea has two natures, one good and the other evil, like so many other things in this world.

(My transl., Thorgeirsdottir 1985, 40)

The sea is also a powerful element in some more recent Icelandic children's books, discussed later in this section. These writings on the sea are not only important for my discussion of national identity, but also the discussion of nature: that it – including the sea – has life and character.

A frightful reminder of the life hidden in nature occurred shortly after midnight on the 23rd of January 1973, when an unexpected volcanic eruption in Heimaey – an island off the south coast of Iceland – resulted in the overnight eviction of all the five thousand inhabitants. In July the same year, when the eruption had fully ceased, 360 houses had been totally destroyed and another 400 damaged, but not a single life had been lost. The event became the subject of at least two children's books, Armann Kr. Einarsson's *Nidur um strompinn* ("Down the Chimney" 1973) and Thorir S. Gudbergsson's *Asta og eldgosid i Eyjum* ("Asta and the Eruption in the Westman Islands" 1973), neither of which is discussed here because they have no other relevance to the discussion. The long term effect, however, may have been that once again the Icelanders were reminded of the forces of nature, right under their feet – a fact which reflects itself in many of the books discussed here.

Pall H. Jonsson's prize-winning book *Berjabitur* ("Berry Picker" 1978) is a romantic tribute to a living Nature that possesses character and moods, and to God who made it. It is one of very few Icelandic animal books (Berry Picker is a bird), but, like most other Icelandic animal books, the protagonist is a human who has a confidential kind of communication with an animal. Having flown in from abroad, Berry Picker is foreign to the Icelandic landscape, and his national identity does not provide him with the tools to survive in it; therefore, the book is also significant for my discussion of national identity.

Jonsson's next book, *Agnarogn* ("Tiny" 1979), which won him the following year's Reykjavik School Board's Award, is also a tribute to Nature – and to traditional values that are disappearing. In this story, Grandpa from *Berjabitur*, or "Berry Picker", explains Nature's wonders and the origins of man to his little grandchild, nicknamed Tiny. This is one of the many Icelandic children's books that probe the effects of urbanisation. Tiny is opposed to houses being built on Grandpa's hill, because it spoils the natural view, and wonders why people cannot build their houses in between hills. Grandpa tells her that people need a beautiful view from their house:

– Houses provide a shelter. Houses are for people. Everybody needs a house. That is a fact. And people must be comfortable in their houses. Then they will be glad, happy and good. A beautiful location for a house, a beautiful house. A good house, good people, Tiny.

(My transl., Jonsson 1979, 18)

Grandpa's words reflect a recurring "problem" in Icelandic society: a phenomenon I would call "the building mania", which means that a young couple should, according to some unwritten Icelandic law, buy a flat or build a house as soon as possible – and have children. This means that while young people are working day in and day out to buy a house, they have, understandably, no time to attend to the children.

The victims of the building mania or the consumer rat race were the innocent bystanders: Icelandic children growing up in the 70s (and the 80s and 90s – the race has not decelerated). Contemporary Icelandic children's books writers have shown great compassion for these latchkey children. The problem of a number of children in contemporary books is not getting food in their mouth, or clothes to keep the cold out, or that irresponsible parents have left them – as for the kids of English "problem books", such as *Gumble's Yard* (Townsend 1961) or *A Pair of Jesus Boots* (Sherry 1969). The problem is that their parents are caught in a race, always trying to get a bigger and better place to live, so they work double shifts. When they come home, generally late at night, they are exhausted – and tell the kids they are doing this for *them*, so *they* will have a bigger (and presumably better) place to live. Ten-year-old Disa, the protagonist of Andres

Indridason's *Lyklabarn* ("The Latchkey-Kid" 1979), has to be alone all day while her parents work double shifts in order to buy a better house in the suburbs. Emil (aged 10), the hero of Gudmundur Olafsson's Icelandic Children's Literature Prize-winning *Emil og Skundi* ("Emil and Skundi" 1986), is also a latchkey-kid, left alone in a flat all day while his parents work long hours because they are building a bigger flat in the suburbs. I have also added three more recent books that deal with the building mania and latchkey-kids: The Icelandic Children's Literature Prize winner, Karl Helgason's *I pokahorninu* ("That Extra Something" 1990), Thordur Helgason's *Tilbuinn undir treverk* ("Ready for Woodwork" 1998), and Steinunn Sigurdardottir's *Fraenkuturninn* ("The Auntie Tower" 1998).

In the midst of this entire consumer craze, writers of children's books would turn their minds back to a time when values were different, when the nation was poor and people had to struggle just to feed their children. Gudrun Helgadóttir's trilogy, *Sitji guds englar* ("All God's Angels" 1983), *Saman í hring* ("Together in a Circle" 1986), and *Saenginni yfir minni* ("Over my Bed" 1987) is about a "grand family", that is, a home where six children live with their parents and grandparents. The titles of the three books are consecutive lines from a well-known child's prayer, which the children recite at night for their grandfather, and each story is told by a different sister. Set just before and during WWII, the trilogy brings together the two fundamentals of Icelandic politics that were mentioned earlier: the life-giving, life-taking sea and the presence of the American navy. It shows the changes in economy and values that took place during the war, as well as different perspectives on it:

When this happened there was a war in the world. The Second World War. And father did not merely catch the fish. He also had to sail with it to England and sell it there. Then the English would be hardy from eating all this wholesome fish and they would fare better at beating the Germans, and Icelanders were on the side of the English in this war..

(My transl., Helgadóttir 1983, 13)

The trilogy contemplates the only losses of lives that the Icelanders suffered due to the war: the Icelandic fishing and trading ships shot at by the Germans and sunk at sea.

Andres Indridason's *Manndomur* ("Manhood" 1990), set during WWII, is also included here because it considers the presence of a foreign army in Reykjavik and the bland feelings of the Icelanders toward the British soldiers. The 16-year-old protagonist's father, ironically bearing the same name as Iceland's national hero, Jon Sigurdsson – whose birthday, June 17th, is celebrated as Iceland's national holiday – loses his job but is too proud to work for the British. Ingibjorg Moller's *Radgata um raudanott* ("Mystery in the Middle of the Night" 1998), involves a mystery revolving around the ruins of British dugouts from the war, and is important for the study of landscape and identity.

One other foreign affairs dispute seems to have affected contemporary writing for children in Iceland: the manuscript issue with the Danish. As mentioned in the Introduction, Iceland was colonized by the Danish from 1387. In the 17th century, Iceland's most precious treasures – the manuscripts of the sagas and Eddas, from as far back as the 12th century – were moved to Copenhagen and stored there. After Iceland got home rule in 1904, the Icelandic Parliament started making arrangements for getting the manuscripts back. This became one of the greatest issues in the nation's fight for independence. However, no decision had been made on the matter when the Republic of Iceland was founded in 1944, and it was not until 1965 that the Danish Parliament decided that a large part of the manuscripts should be returned in the next 25 years.⁷ The first of these were brought by a Danish frigate in 1971, and welcomed at the dock in Reykjavik by every flag-waving Icelander who could get there. In 1986, the final agreement for the division of the manuscript collection between Copenhagen and Reykjavik was made. The manuscript issue undoubtedly increased the Icelanders' interest in the nation's heritage, and the gradual return of the manuscripts kept the national spirit alive during the

⁷ The Danish manuscript institute website states: "After much heated debate, a law was enacted by the Danish parliament on 26 May 1965 whereby such documents in the Arnarnagnæan Collection as might be held to be "Icelandic cultural property" (islandsk kultureje) – broadly defined as a work composed or translated by an Icelander and whose content is wholly or chiefly concerned with Iceland – were to be transferred to the newly established Icelandic Manuscript Institute." Arnarnagnæan Institute, *Transfer of Manuscripts to Iceland* (Faculty of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen, 2001 [cited 16 February 2001]); available from <http://www.hum.ku.dk/ami/index.html>.

three decades discussed here. Icelandic children's book writers caught the spark and have turned it into many a flame burning for the preservation of the national heritage. Gudlaug Richter's *Sonur Sigurdar* ("Son of Sigurd" 1987), published a year after the final manuscript agreement, goes back to the time of the sagas, of chieftains and blood feud. The 19-year-old protagonist of *Jora og eg* by Gudlaug Richter ("Iora and I" 1988), finds an ancient manuscript in the library where she works; it tells the story of Iora and strange things that happen to her in 1104. The modern girl is captivated by Iora's story: she learns how to read the manuscript and types it up, revealing the 12th century story bit by bit. Valny (15), of Idunn Steinsdottir's *Thokugaldur* ("Magic in the Mist" 1996), also gets obsessed with an old story when she has a vision of a girl having a dispute with a young man. Valny finds out who the girl was, and that the scene she saw must have taken place in 1831. Sigrun Davidsdottir's Reykjavik School Board Prize-winner, *Silfur Egils* ("Egil's Silver" 1989) is one more book involving the unearthing of heritage. Two brothers, Snorri (aged 9) and Gunnar (aged 13), are travelling with their parents in Paris when they discover an ancient manuscript that shows the location of Egil's silver (the Icelandic sagas say that Egill Skallagrimsson buried his silver near his farm).⁸ Gunnar wonders if Egil's Saga is true, and asks his grandfather when he is back in Iceland.

"Look," grandfather said. "We can picture that there were many short stories available about Egil, just as there are many stories about people that now exist. These stories were collected and combined into one whole story. In some of them there may have been conversations or something that someone was supposed to have done, but the recorder of the story may have invented other things where he saw fit."

"Yes, but then some things are just made up."

"That's possible, but we just can't know what's true and what's not. I believe the story could be true. It has coherence. Everything in it fits together. That's why it's true for me."

(My transl., Davidsdottir 1989, 56-7)

Gunnar is convinced that the story about the silver is true, and the brothers set off to find it. A Frenchman who manages to retrieve the manuscript from the brothers tries to beat them to the location, but the boys succeed in finding the archaeological treasure.

⁸ The boys' names are important: Snorri's name is the same as the writer of Snorra-Edda (one of the manuscripts returned from Copenhagen), Gunnar is one of the heroes of Njals-saga (preserved in another Footnote continued on next page.

An object from the past is also central in tying together the present and the past in Illugi Jökulsson's *Silfurkrossinn* ("The Silver Cross" 1996), which won The Reykjavik School Board Award, and *Her a reiki* by Gunnhildur Hrólfssdóttir ("Spirits in the Air" 1996). In *Silfurkrossinn*, two children discover that the construction site for their newly-built house is a former monastery, and they try to find a silver cross belonging to one of the monks that lived there before the Viking settlers came to Iceland. The protagonist of *Her a reiki* ("Spirits in the Air") tries desperately to find a brooch, which belonged to her great-great-grandmother, because it would protect her, like her ancestor, from evil spirits in the air. Objects are also important transmitters in two time-travel stories that link together past and present: my book, *Galdrastafir og graen augu* ("Magic Letters and Green Eyes", Pálsdóttir 1997) and Kristín Steinsdóttir's *Vestur í bláinn* ("Westwards into the Blue" 1999). Sverri, the hero of *Galdrastafir og graen augu* ("Magic Letters and Green Eyes") finds a magic letter inscribed on a rock in the South of Iceland, rubs it, and is transported back to 1713. A book of magic letters from that time, preserved in the National Museum, becomes his only link to the past he misses so much on his return. The National Museum is also central to *Vestur í bláinn* ("Westwards into the Blue"), as the girl protagonist is locked in there after closing time, and steps into the past through one of the paintings hanging on the walls. She joins one of the large groups of Icelanders that left the country at the end of the 19th century for what they believed to be greener pastures in Canada.

These eight books, all concerning national heritage and the past – and all in some way or the other connected with landscape – are significant for my discussion of heritage, landscape and national identity, and most of them are also imperative for studying how folktales in Icelandic children's books can become intertwined with the daily life of the characters. Icelandic culture embraces a rich source of folk tales and the sagas and Eddas, which contain vivid accounts of Old Norse mythology, written in the language still spoken

one of the manuscripts).

everywhere in contemporary Iceland. While conducting my research of Icelandic children's literature I was astounded by the fact that remarkably few Icelandic writers use Norse mythology in their writing for children, whereas children's books writers from other European countries, e.g. Kevin Crossley-Holland in England and Scandinavian Lars-Henrik Olsen, have written glowing stories about Odin and Thor and the other gods, based on the Eddas.⁹ The fact that Lars-Henrik Olsen's books have been published and republished in translation shows that Icelandic children are very fond of the subject.¹⁰ I have contemplated various reasons for this lack of enthusiasm: perhaps Icelanders consider the Eddas too "holy" to improvise on them? Maybe we fear that by extolling the old heroic and exciting gods in children's books we would tantalise children away from Christianity? Whatever the reason for their disinterest in Odin and the other gods, Icelandic children's books authors have, however, borrowed heavily from the various "offshoots" originating in Old Norse mythology, preserved in the nation's folktales: stories of dwarves, trolls, elves, fairies and other supernatural beings, which abound in contemporary Icelandic writing for children.

Folktales and folk belief is an incredibly strong element of Icelandic children's literature. I would suggest that the majority of Icelandic children's books have some mention of these, however realistic the book may be, either as a main ingredient or for adding zing to the story (for example when characters pass a landmark with an attached tale, or a ghost story is related). Dwarves and elves enter the reality of quite a few characters in children's books and befriend them. A young boy in Benony Aegisson's short story, "Tritlaveislan" sees a small being and follows him to his world ("The Tiny People's Party" 1985). The girl in Adalsteinn A. Sigurdsson's *Dvergasteinn* ("Dwarf Stone" 1991) encounters a dwarf

⁹ See, for example, Kevin Crossley-Holland, *Axe-Age, Wolf-Age: A Selection from the Norse Myths*, illustrated by Hannah Firmin (London: Deutsch, 1985) and Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (London: André Deutsch, 1980).

¹⁰ Lars-Henrik Olsen's *Ferd Eiriks til Asgards* and *Ferd Eiriks til Jotunheima* ("Eirik's Trip to Asgard" and "Eirik's Trip to Jotunheim") were first published in 1987 and 1988 in Iceland and republished in 1999. Lars-Henrik Olsen, *Ferd Eiriks til Asgards*, illustrated by Erik Hjorth Nielsen (Reykjavik: Mal og menning, Footnote continued on next page.

and assists him in finding his magic stone. The protagonist of Andres Indridason's *Aevintyralegt samband* ("A Fairy-Tale Relationship" 1997) discovers he *is* an elf: his parents are some sort of ambassadors for the elves in the human world. All these stories, like *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (Garner 1960), begin with children in our "real" world, living a "normal" life until the moment that creatures from another world enter their reality. In the Icelandic books, children learn something from the experience: the relationship with the supernatural being is very personal, close, and often of a protective nature. In Garner's *Weirdstone*, however, there is an outside threat from supernatural creatures, and the children are saving the whole of England by seizing the stone. This disparity will be considered in the discussion about how the nation's historical background affects contemporary writing for children.

The supernatural is also incorporated into Icelandic children's books in the form of ghosts, as in Gudjon Sveinsson's short story, "Helga" (1985), Thorgrimur Thrainsson's *Nottin lifnar vid* ("The Night Comes Alive" 1998), and Helgi Jonsson's *Gaesahud* ("Goosebumps" 1997). The young boy in "Helga" is afraid because of a ghost tale related to him by a bus driver on his way to a farm in the countryside. *Nottin lifnar vid* is an independent sequel to Thrainsson's Icelandic Children's Literature Prize-winning *Margt byr i myrkrinu* ("The Dark Hides a Million Things" Thrainsson 1997), drawing on the same folk tale from the 17th century to add conflict to the story. Like many of the other books discussed here it links folktales to place, and is therefore significant for my analysis of landscape and identity. No literary claims, however, can be made for *Gaesahud* ("Goosebumps" Jonsson 1997), but I had to include it in the study because the words of an old man are significant for the discussion of bygone generations.

These children's books, comprising dwarves, elves, ghosts and other supernatural beings, all concern children in this world, that is: they start from reality, undergo an invasion of

1999) and Lars-Henrik Olsen, *Ferd Eiriks til Jotunheima*, illustrated by Erik Hjorth Nielsen (Reykjavik: Footnote continued on next page.

the fantastic, and end in reality (as we know it). Folk tales and fairy tales have for a long time been elements of Icelandic children's literature, but high fantasy, taking place in a different world, has not been as popular in Iceland as in England. Silja Adalsteinsdottir notices the disinterest in this genre in Iceland, but comments:

For the last decade or so, legend and fantasy has increased in books in the 8-12 category, probably both on account of foreign influence from books and movies, and as a reaction to New Realism, which many people thought would cramp the imagination.

(My transl. Adalsteinsdottir 1999, 30)

Among the first secondary world fantasies in Iceland are Heidur Baldursdottir's *Alagadalurinn* ("The Enchanted Valley" 1989) and Idunn Steinsdottir's *Gegnum thyrnigerdid* ("Through the Thistle" 1991), both winners of the Icelandic Children's Literature Prize. They are included here, as well as Thorvaldur Thorsteinsson's more recent noteworthy fantasy, *Eg heiti Blidfinnur en thu matt kalla mig Bobo* ("My Name is Blidfinnur But You Can Call Me Bobo" 1998), winner of the Reykjavik School Board Award. They are examples of how the past is romanticized in fantasies (e.g. they focus on rural landscapes, untouched by technology), and of how a writer's national identity shines through his or her writing, even in other world fantasies. *Gegnum thyrnigerdid* ("Through the Thistle") is also notable because it is obviously inspired by the fall of the Berlin wall: the thick thistle that separates the monopolized East and the free West in the story falls down in the end because of the people's solidarity.

When realism became a prevailing genre, both in England and Iceland, the rural developed into a place where fantasies took place and the supernatural lived on, but the town and city became a natural environment for child characters in more realistic books. Some children's writers in Iceland kept writing books about children being sent to the country, but now the children had "problems" that were resolved during their rural visit. The 8-year-old city boy of Dora Stefansdottir's *Breidholtsstrakur fer i sveit* ("A Suburban Boy in the Country" 1985), son of a single mother in Reykjavik, is sent for the summer to a farm

Mal og menning, 1999).

which takes “problem” kids to stay, supported by the social services. Hakon (15), of Elias Snaeland Jonsson’s *Brak og brestir* (“Squeaking and Screeching” 1993), son of a single father in Reykjavik, has had some problems with alcohol when his father decides to leave the city and move to a small town on the coast. Alcohol problems also show up in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir’s *Thad sem enginn ser* (“What No-One Can See” 1998), where a girl, the victim of sexual abuse, and a boy who has recently lost his father, team up to steal a lady’s purse. Jon (16) of Gudmundur Olafsson’s *Heljarstokk afturabak* (“A Backwards Somersault” 1998), tries alcohol because of peer pressure, has a bad hangover, and decides to leave it alone. The 15-year-old trouble-laden hero of *K/K*:

Keflavikurdagar/Keflavikurnaetur (“K/K: Keflavik Days/Keflavik Nights” Bjornsson 1995), tries a couple of cigarettes but throws up and vows never to touch the stuff again. These “problem-oriented” books tend to have simple solutions to the problems involved, much simpler than their English counterparts considered here (e.g. Aidan Chambers’ *Dance on my Grave*, 1982). When social workers get involved with the young people in question, all seems to go well, the relationship is unobstructed. The Icelandic social system has not been under as much scrutiny as the English system; there is more optimism in the Icelandic children’s books, and more faith in the Icelandic social system, than in texts which deal with parallel interactions in English children’s books.

A few Icelandic children’s books are more realistic than the above when dealing with the problems of Icelandic society: they question the values without providing simple (and sometimes unrealistic) solutions. Prime examples are Olafur H. Simonarson’s *Gauragangur* (“All Hell Loose” 1988) and Olga Gudrun Arnadottir’s *Ped a planetunni jord* (“A Pawn on Planet Earth” 1995), which criticize the education system, society, the welfare system and the rat race, for example. Both of these, as well as the other “problem” books, are important in relation to my discussion on values in Chapter 4.

Two more Icelandic books covered here have not yet been accounted for. *Benjamin Dufa* (“Benjamin Dove” 1992) by Fridrik Erlingsson won all three prizes: The Icelandic Children’s Literature Prize, The Reykjavik School Board Award and the IBBY award. It is, like the other children’s books, included in the study for various reasons, including the impact of a foreign culture. The lives of the main characters, Andres, Baldur and Benjamin, change when a new boy, Roland MacIntosh, moves into the neighbourhood. He is from Scotland, but his mother is Icelandic. An old lady’s house burns down and the boys start a collection to build her a new house and thereby save her from being committed to a home for the elderly. For this reason, *Benjamin dufa* is significant for my analysis of how social services are scrutinised in children’s books. This book, as well as the last Icelandic children’s book listed here, Elias Snaeland Jonsson’s *Navigi a hvalaslod* (“In the Trail of Whales” 1998), are also important for my discussion about the relatively “rose-tinted” optimism of Icelandic children’s books, which is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

NATIONAL VALUES AND NATIONAL MYTHS

Everyday life is the historically conditioned framework in which the imperatives of natural sustenance (eating, sleeping. . .) come to be socially determined: it is in the intersubjectivity of everyday life that human self-reproduction is welded to the wider process of social reproduction. Thus while everyday life may well be naturalised and taken for granted . . . it is in reality socially formed and complex. At the heart of everyday life, therefore, is the interdependency of person and society. The social world always already exists to confront the people who are born into it, and it places demands which must be met if people are to make their way. There are *values and norms* to be appropriated and internalised, *institutions and things* to be understood, *language and customs* with which to come to terms.

(My emphasis, Wright 1985, 6-7)

With these words, Patrick Wright compounds John Donne's suggestion from *Devotions*:

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent" (Donne 1624).

No person is totally independent of the society into which he or she happens to be born.

Everyday life is just as "socially complex" as Wright holds, and the individual has to learn and internalise, step by step, the rules or codes of the society. Wright lists them as:

- values
- norms
- institutions (and things)
- language
- customs

I have earlier listed the transmission of values, norms, attitudes and predispositions as a vital part of a cultural materialist analysis. In accord with the "identity triangle" introduced in the first chapter (page 15), the design of this thesis enables a consideration and analysis of identity, history and landscape, in that order. This chapter therefore concentrates on identity, ordering the topics in accordance with Patrick Wright's suggestion. Beginning with values – branching into personal values, family values, and national values – I move on to discussing "norms" and the meaning of "normality" and "reality" in children's books. Then to institutions, which need to be "understood" in order to construct identity. Language, next on Wright's list, is multi-functional in the formation

and sustenance of national identity and its role will be discussed in section 4.7. The final section of this chapter examines “customs” or rituals of the society, which are practised in order to promote and secure national identity. All of these are equally important, vital steps in the formation and maintenance of identity.

4.1. Personal Values

Values are general tendencies in a culture which can make a difference in the way people conduct their lives.

(My transl.Olafsson 1985, 4)

The appropriation and internalisation of values are, according to Patrick Wright, one of the basic steps a person has to take to make his or her way into and through society. When we refer to values, we generally mean standards or qualities that are considered worthwhile and desirable. The value system of a nation has been influenced by the nation’s history and landscape, and formed by tradition. I would argue that a nation’s shaped and selected value systems are reflected in the nation’s children’s literature. For this purpose, I have focussed on how some particular values, which lie at the heart of the nation, are manifested in English and Icelandic children’s books, beginning with personal values.

Personal values lie at the heart of identity: one’s identity is based on certain values that he or she has chosen from a vast range, accepted as justifiable, and internalised. The selection of values is made on a basis provided by the culture into which one is born. By these “personal” values, of which we are hardly aware, we make judgements as to what is right or wrong, good or bad, or if something is worth sacrificing our life for. Once internalised, they become a part of one’s personality. For example, Lyra, the protagonist of Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (1995) knows what is right and what is wrong without having consciously absorbed or internalised the values on which her judgement is based:

She longed to touch that fur, to rub her cheeks against it, but of course she never did; for it was the grossest breach of etiquette imaginable to touch another person’s dæmon. Dæmons might touch each other, of course, or fight; but the prohibition against human-dæmon contact went so deep that even in battle no warrior would touch an enemy’s dæmon. It was utterly forbidden. Lyra couldn’t

remember having to be told that: she just knew it, as instinctively as she felt that nausea was bad and comfort good.

(Pullman 1995, 143)

What we think is instinct, is governed by a value system so thoroughly internalised that it has become a part of our identity. A sample from an Icelandic children's book, Dora Stefansdottir's *Breidholtsstrakur fer i sveit* ("A Suburban Boy in the Country" 1985), compounds the notion of an interior right-or-wrong judgement system. A group of kids have in a moment of passion broken all car windows on a small scrap dump near the farm where 8-year-old Palli stays for the summer. When their frenzy fades away, they feel guilty: "They looked at each other. This had certainly been forbidden. They didn't know how they knew. They just knew it somehow" (Stefansdottir 1985, 47). The children, who come from different parts of Iceland, city and country, have assimilated a similar set of values. The same prohibition, like the taboo on touching other people's daemons in Lyra's world, is part of each of the children's personal identity. Through direct and indirect messages, the children have absorbed their nation's preferred values and made them part of their identity.

Brian Graham defines identity thus:

In general terms, it incorporates values, beliefs and aspirations, which are used to construct simplifying structures of sameness that identify the self with like-minded people. Identity is a multi-faceted phenomenon that embraces a range of human attributes, including language, religion, ethnicity, nationalism and shared interpretations of the past.

(Graham, 1998A, 1)

Although what we refer to as "personal" values is a unique set of judgmental standards, selected by an individual, these tend to be co-dependent on the underlying value systems of the society which nurtures that person. Individual values do not originate and evolve in a vacuum: they stem from a value system, and the development of those values is invariably influenced by a ruling power. As John B. Thompson points out, ideology does not have only one, generally negative, meaning (i.e. maintaining domination), but it also operates "like a kind of social cement, binding the members of a society together by

providing them with collectively shared values and norms” (Thompson 1984, 5). Having a similar set of values as the other members of a society means a stronger sense of belonging to it: the shared values, the “social cement”, constitute a common identity. The “sharing” of identity begins at the family level.

4.2. Family Values

“Even an unsatisfactory family life is better than none.”
(*Gumble’s Yard*, Townsend 1961, 123)

Since the first books which were specifically written for children appeared, the significance of children’s books as a means of “teaching” children values has been recognised. There is no doubt among scholars, critics, teachers and parents that children’s books *do* transmit values. Children’s author Philip Pullman pointed out in his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech in 1996 that “All stories teach, whether the storyteller intends them to or not. They teach the world we create. They teach the morality we live by. They teach it much more effectively than moral precepts and instructions” (Pullman 1996). The importance of children’s books in teaching family values is highlighted by Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers in “Word Children” (Rogers 1998). They quote Randall Jarrel, who states in his Introduction to Christina Stead’s *The Man Who Loved Children* that “if all mankind [*sic*] had been reared in orphan asylums for a thousand years, it could learn to have families again” by reading Stead’s book (Stead 1975). Rogers and Rogers point out that this shows how family life can be textualized,

a script which contains the necessary information to constitute the discourse and conductivities that are family life. A great number of the stories of young life that adults (and, sometimes, the young also) enjoy fit this description, usually by default as well as by commission: *Heidi*, *Little Women*, *Tom Sawyer* and the *oeuvre* of Enid Blyton.

(Rogers 1998, 191)

There is no doubt that an idealised family life portrayed in children’s books provides a nostalgic image for people who worry about the future of the family as a unit in modern society.

A discussion of the transmission of values, including family values, through children's books, cannot take place without considering politics and ideology. Peter Hunt points out that "you *cannot* abstract politics from talking about books" (Hunt 1991B, 142, his emphasis). Therefore, some aspects of contemporary Icelandic and English politics, which concern the family, have been taken into consideration here.

Most of Enid Blyton's books, which Rogers and Rogers state may "teach" English family values, were written in the 1950s. In England, the 1950s and the 1960s were the years of the welfare state, mixed economy and full employment. The 1970's world economic crisis brought an end to the welfare era, resulting in what has been termed as Thatcherism, a major cutback in state provision in education, health and social security. In the previous chapter, I quoted Pilcher and Wagg in *Thatcher's Children*, who recollected Margaret Thatcher's famous political declaration: "There is no such thing as 'society'. There are men. And there are women. And there are families" (Pilcher and Wagg 1996, 2).

Thatcher's government, the New Right, which won the 1979 general election, focused on the idea of the "nuclear family", as Pilcher and Wagg point out:

For the New Right, the traditional, self-reliant, patriarchal nuclear family is *the* central social institution and the condition of the family serves, therefore, as an index of the moral well-being of the wider society.

(Pilcher and Wagg 1996, 3)

At the end of the 1970s the idea of the nuclear family became a central concept in British society and politics. In *Ways of Reading*, Martin Montgomery et al. agree that political debate has a way of idealizing the family image:

The use of the term *the family* in recent political debate emphasizes the sense of a self-contained economic unit living in its own home independently of state and social support (the 'nuclear family') - a sense which tends to exclude single parents, unmarried parents and so on. The fact that such a definition does not accord with the way the majority of people live in Britain in the late twentieth century goes some way to demonstrating the ideological work to which language can be recruited in an attempt to promote or legitimate particular versions of reality.

(Montgomery 1992, 74)

For the main part of the period of my study, or from 1979 to 1996, Thatcherism dominated English society, which was projected idealism circulated upon the notion of the family. This political projection seemed determined to produce a sense of united “Englishness” in a multicultural society.

Icelandic politics of the 1970s, 80s and 90s were much more turbulent than in England: indeed more chaotic than at any other time in the history of the republic of Iceland, after the lucrative post-war years. The title of Joan Littlewood’s famous English musical, “Oh! What a Lovely War,” could apply to the influence of WWII on Icelandic economy. During the war years, the national product increased by 38 percent, unemployment vanished, and the Icelandic community changed from revolving around agriculture into a consumer society (Snaevarr 1999). The 1960s brought even more wealth through herring, the “Silver of the Sea”, but, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the herring industry collapsed in 1968, resulting in a twenty percent decrease in exports, and unemployment went up to five percent.

Whereas the same conservative government had ruled Iceland from 1959 to 1971, the rest of the 1970s and 1980s were in political turmoil. According to Icelandic law, government elections should take place every fourth year, but as this table shows, there were seven different governments ruling the country in fourteen years (1978-1991):

Period	Mainly	Leading Party
1971-1974	Left	Progressive
1974-1978	Right	Conservative
1978-1979	Left	Progressive
1979-1980	Independent	Social democrats
1980-1983	Independent	Conservative
1983-1987	Right	Progressive
1987-1988	Right	Conservative
1988-1989	Left	Progressive
1989-1991	Independent	Progressive
1991-present	Right	Conservative

The progressive government of 1983 tried desperately to save the national economy by plummeting the exchange rate by 14%, discontinuing wage indexing, changing work

politics, etc. Sigurdur Snaevarr points out that in spite of all these precautions, the years from 1988 to 1993 were a period of regression and increased unemployment (Snaevarr 1999). The added economic pressure resulted in the split-up of traditional family patterns, which again led to an increase in single-parent families. Icelandic politics took a new trend towards promising support to the growing number of single mothers in particular.

Notions of the family in English and Icelandic politics from the late 1970s to the late 1990s were polarised. Whereas in England the ideological projection centred on the nuclear family, in Iceland the notion of a well-provided-for single parent was idealised. In order to determine whether English and Icelandic children's books reflect these notions, I have sorted my selection of 43 English and 43 Icelandic children's books according to the family pattern to which the protagonist belongs (for the complete list, see Appendix I). Some of them, mainly animal books, prove difficult to categorize into a family pattern. Yet, books with animal characters often portray a model of family organization, embedded in the text. The writer imposes an idealised family pattern onto species that normally do not have a "family life". Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972) is, for example, a patriarchal model of social organization, which exerts power through the notion of an extended family. The same applies to W. J. Corbett's *The Song of Pentecost* (1982), which portrays an extended family of mice, where all the heroes are male and it is they who make the decisions. The only females rendered are old Mother and the Aunts, who weave and knit and repeat: "Busyness is next to Godliness" (Corbett 1982, 26). Although the main character in Henrietta Branford's *Fire, Bed and Bone* (1997), is a dog, he belongs to a couple, Rufus and Comfort, with a baby and twins. All three books are considered as rendering a "nuclear" family. As for the Icelandic books, there are rarely animal characters to be found in them. Only one of the books covered here, Pall H. Jonsson's *Berjabitur* ("Berry-Picker" 1978), has an animal character, but Grandpa and Granny take care of him and therefore it counts as a "nuclear family" book.

Family of protagonist:	England	Iceland
A "nuclear" family	18	34

Orphaned children or absent parents	10	1
Other family patterns	15	8
Total	43	43

The figures show that children's books seem to go against the dominant ideology. Only 42% of the English books portray a protagonist belonging to a nuclear family – in a society which centred on the family. In Iceland, where single parenthood was supported by the government, 79%, or more than three quarters, render a “nuclear” family. It must be reiterated here that these books were not chosen for my study because the majority of them portray disrupted family life. They were chosen mainly because they have been received awards, or they are well known, or widely discussed.

The English authors in the sample taken for this study seem to have written literature for children which was in opposition to the projected ideal of Thatcherism. They wrote into the deconstruction of the real, and reconstruction of the child's position into a positive, despite the dysfunctional nature of the English family. The orphaned boy in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* deconstructs himself as a boy and reconstructs himself in the positive image of a mouse:

What's so wonderful about being a little boy anyway? Why is that necessarily any better than being a mouse? I know that mice get hunted and they sometimes get poisoned or caught in traps. But little boys sometimes get killed, too. Little boys can be run over by motor-cars or they can die of some awful illness. Little boys have to go to school. Mice don't. Mice don't have to pass exams. Mice don't have to worry about money. Mice, as far as I can see, have only two enemies, humans and cats. My grandmother is a human, but I know for certain that she will always love me whoever I am. And she never, thank goodness, keeps a cat. When mice grow up, they don't ever have to go to war and fight against other mice.

(Dahl 1983, 118-119)

This pattern of deconstruction-reconstruction, involving a dysfunctional family, can be detected in numerous other English books of the 1980s and 90s. The following examples elucidate this phenomenon. In Hugh Scott's *Why Weeps the Brogan?* (1989), the two children, Saxon and Gilbert, who have been trapped inside the London Museum for four years in a post-holocaust world, have reconstructed a world of their own within the museum. They have named a strange creature who shares the museum with them, the Brogan, not realizing that it is in fact their injured mother. Harry, the protagonist of Robert

Westall's *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1990), finds his home deconstructed by a German air raid, which kills the other members of his family, so he reconstructs his own kingdom by the sea. Finally, when Lyra Belacqua, the heroine of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) and *The Subtle Knife* (1997), finds her "safe" existence in Jordan College terminated, she constructs a new identity for herself in a different world, assuming a new name, Lyra Silvertongue.

The children in these samples: the mouse-boy, Saxon and Gilbert, Harry, and Lyra Belacqua, find their world collapsing; there is no safety-net to catch them when they fall. Their lives, as they knew it, have been terminated and they have to re-create a world which suits them and develop skills which help them to survive in that world. These young people are representative of post-modern identities, which, as Douglas Kellner points out, "suggest that one can change, that one can remake oneself, that one can free oneself from whatever traps and restrictions one finds oneself ensconced in" (Kellner 1995, 259). English children's literature has to focus upon the "skilling" of the child, the preparation for making and remaking because that is what the national culture has to do. As will be discussed later, "Englishness" itself is a fractured reality, because England as an image has been ruptured and the safety-net of tradition and heritage has too many holes that need to be mended. The reality of "Englishness" cannot exist in fact since it is a fiction in itself.

In contrast, Icelandic children's literature of the last thirty years has no "desire" to re-create or critique itself in relation to externalities. The safety-net is complete; Iceland has no unsolved issues with the past. Its weakness is its position as a small country on the edge of the inhabitable world: the Icelanders have to keep bolstering their self-confidence as a nation by believing in the country's uniqueness and their own excellence. The nation has to protect itself through regenerative idealism and the external realities continue and gain energy from this central idealisation. Icelandic children's authors write about the unified notion of the family, despite the reality of divorce and a large number of unwed

young mothers (in 1993, single parent families amounted to 9.3% of all Icelandic families: see Olafsdottir 2000). Only one of the Icelandic books portrays an orphan, Thorsteinsson's *Eg heiti Blidfinnur en þú mæt kalla mig Bobo* ("My Name is Blidfinnur But You Can Call me Bobo" 1998). Blidfinnur is, however, an elf character in another world. If the English characters of Harry Potter, Lyra Belacqua or Will Parry appeared in Icelandic society, questions would be raised concerning the whereabouts of all the aunts and uncles, grandparents and great-aunts and uncles. The children would be out of place because children in Icelandic children's books live in a safely constructed world: they may encounter danger while leaving the safety of home – most often to visit the countryside – but they almost always have their safe haven of family and friends to return to. In Iceland, there is a unified notion of the family: family ties are extremely strong and the family provides services which society, i.e. institutions, would be responsible for in many other Western countries. The next section moves outward from family values to national values: the value systems that the nation embraces, and the part that children's literature plays in passing them on.

4.3. National Values and National Myths

It is recognised that one nation's values, norms and customs are communicated to its young members in a variety of ways, for example via education, social and political programmes. However, the focus here is on the role of children's literature as a functional narrative in this process – i.e. how national myths are passed through children's books.

National myths have a variety of functions, as Ernest J. Yanarella and Lee Sigelman demonstrate:

Whether or not myths are based on past events or on a tissue of artful fabrications, they congeal into emotionally charged images or mental pictures that are accepted as valid; and they achieve an even stronger hold on people's minds when they are "reinforced by song, story, nostalgia, and the media" (Gerster and Cords 1977, xiii). Thus, myth can be viewed as a belief or symbol expressed in dramatic narrative form that lives on in the psyche and culture of a people, often because it is invested with emotional intensity and fulfils the important societal need of binding a populace together.

(Yanarella and Sigelman 1988, 3)

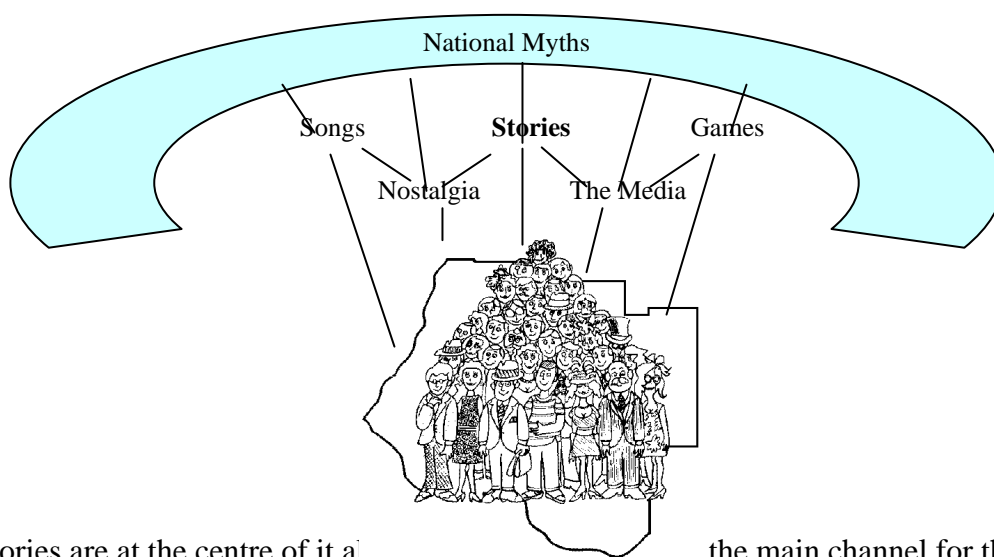
The potential function of myth in “binding” a populace together is a vital concept into this study – and also the fact that myths, *reinforced by stories*, “congeal into emotionally charged images”. As such, they are important for the creation and preservation of national identity, as Yanarella and Siegelman point out:

Because national myths take on the character of collective representations that reconcile and unite many contradictory aspects of the past, over the course of several generations, they come to form parts of a national identity and a common heritage.

(Yanarella and Sigelman 1988, 4)

National myths help people to form a connection with the world into which they are born, and to understand and accept their place in the universe. Richard Slotkin claims that through national myths, “the psychology and world view of our cultural ancestors are transmitted to modern descendents” (Slotkin 1978, 3). The values of those that have passed before us, transmitted through all kinds of stories, contribute to the formation and maintenance of our national identity.

National myths, as I conceive of them, permeate the stories we tell our children. They are part of what Tony Watkins calls the “overarching mythic proto-narratives that underpin our beliefs about the world” (Watkins 1992, 184). Converting this conceptual position into graphic form produces the following model:



Stories are at the centre of it all – the main channel for the circulation of national myths. They may be stories that people tell each other, derived

from everyday life; they may be folk tales, oral or written; they may be autobiographies, biographies, novels, sitcoms or movies; but all of them – to a smaller or larger degree – reflect values which have been shaped and re-shaped for centuries of the history of a nation.

Out of the vast collection of stories that transmit national values from the hovering arc of national myths to the individuals of the society, children's literature, I argue, plays the most important part. We use stories to entertain our children, but at the same time they "map" the world for them (see page 6). Children's literature is directed at the nation's youngest members, who are more susceptible to influence than its elders; it is produced and distributed by grown-ups in the society, who, not always consciously, can select which values are preferable for conveyance. The stories we tell children encapsulate our world-view: the values and norms that we would want the budding generation to embrace, or at least *consider* embracing.

Children's books used to be much more openly didactic: the indoctrination which was acceptable in children's books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is not as blatant now; there are different trends in children's literature, where society is depicted in different ways. What is considered to be acceptable in English books is perhaps not allowable in Icelandic books. Reading Aidan Chambers' *Dance on my Grave* (1982) and Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996) revealed to me how drenched Icelandic children's literature is with rose-tinted optimism. An Icelandic writer tries to avoid mentioning homosexuality, drug use, alcohol abuse and smoking, because Icelandic society wants to believe it is perfect – even in books for adults. The optimism and unfailing belief in the nuclear family in Icelandic children's books is notable regarding other concerns of the society as well. It is especially prominent when it comes to drinking alcohol and smoking. Problems with alcohol consumption have been harassing Icelanders for quite a while. Sigurlína Davídsdóttir points out that according to SAA (an independent alcohol rehabilitation

institute), close to 16% of Icelanders go through rehabilitation at some time in their life, or almost one out of every six people (Davidsdottir 2001). A survey conducted in 1996 showed that 92% of seventeen-year-olds had tried alcohol (Adalbjarnardottir, et al. 1997). An official report quotes a survey conducted in 1992, which reveals that 78% of 16-year-old students had become “drunk” in the last 30 days (The Icelandic Ministry of Health and Social Security 2000).

This is reality, information provided by observers using scientific methods: the etic analysis. But this is not the reality portrayed in Icelandic children’s books – my emic information. None of the protagonists in my selection of books actually like drinking beer or alcohol. Other young people may, but not a children’s books hero or heroine. Nonni, aged 16, in *Heljarstokk afturabak* has a Coke when his friends drink beer. “Not because he was some kind of teetotaller, but alcohol had simply never tempted him” (“A Backwards Somersault” Olafsson 1998, 73). Later, because of peer pressure, he tries it and gets sick. “Never again would he taste alcohol. Not even smell it!” (*ibid*, 92). Kalli, one of the supporting characters in *Tilbuinn undir treverk* (1998), has been drinking, and when he shows up at work, the first thing he does is to throw up into the toilet. As he crouches there, face green, eyes red, all sweaty, Sonja, a girl of sixteen, hands him an AA-booklet. The other young people support her, saying that he will be dragged down if he does not pull his act together (Helgason 1998, 47).

Being used to such denunciation of alcohol in children’s books in my country, I hesitated when translating the part of Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (“Gyllti attavitinn” published in Iceland in my translation in 2000), which portrays Lyra and her friend Roger in the wine cellars of Jordan college, sharing a bottle of red wine. Even though Lyra throws up, she actually says she *likes* the wine (Pullman 1995, 48). Later, during Mrs. Coulter’s cocktail party, Lyra is “half-interested in the taste of the cocktails she wasn’t allowed to try” (Pullman 1995, 94). An Icelandic children’s books author could not allow herself or himself to express a twelve-year-old’s fancy for alcoholic drink. Nor do they

portray a hero who smokes, although a 1992 survey shows that almost one out of four 16-19 year old students smoke regularly (The Icelandic Ministry of Health and Social Security 2000). Some heroes in children's books try a cigarette, but they usually get sick and decide never to try it again (e.g. Metta in Hrolfsdottir 1996, 9). If an Icelandic children's author rendered a hero who *likes* drinking or smoking, he or she would be writing against the Icelandic tradition of constantly regenerating itself by reiterating the nation's beliefs, whether they be "true" or "false". Again, Icelandic children's literature writes out of an idealised position: Icelandic children's authors seemingly want to play their part in reinforcing a "perfect" society by evading sensitive issues.

Another evasion of issues is apparent as regards whaling. Icelanders had been involved in whaling for about a century when the issue of whaling came into international debate in the 1980s. The International Whaling Committee (IWC) limited the number of whales that Iceland was allowed to hunt to about 200 a year in 1977 to 1985. In November 1986, the environmentalist group Sea Shepard sank a couple of whaling boats in Reykjavik harbour – an act which aroused fury in a lot of Icelanders, because Iceland was complying with IWC's regulations. When IWC issued a complete ban on whaling in 1988, the Icelanders ceased their hunting, and not a single whale has been hunted since 1989. This does not mean that the matter has been settled once and for all. Iceland resigned from IWC in 1991, to collaborate with Norway, Greenland and the Faroe Islands in a new co-operation called NAMMCO (the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission). The Icelanders are still determined to continue whaling: Surveys conducted by Gallup Iceland from 1993 to 2000 show that around 77 to 88% of Icelanders support the continuance of whaling (Gallup Iceland 2000).

Although the whaling issue has been debated with much fierceness in Icelandic newspapers and in the Icelandic Parliament, which decided in March 1999 that "whaling should be recommenced at the earliest convenience" (Jonasdottir 2000), it was hardly, if ever, mentioned in children's books of the 80s and early 90s. It was not until whale Keiko,

star of the movie *Free Willy* (1993), was returned to his North Atlantic birthplace in September 1998 that whales made their way into Icelandic children's books, for example in Kristin Helga Gunnarsdottir's *Keiko, hvalur í heimsreisú* ("Keiko, a Whale on a World Trip" 1998) and Thorgrímur Þrainsson's *Hjalp, Keiko, hjalp!* ("Help, Keiko, Help!" 1998). These two books will not be discussed here, as they are meant for younger children, but instead I have included Elías Snaeland Jonsson's *Navigi a hvalaslod* ("In the Trail of Whales" 1998), the story of a 14-year-old boy, Ingi, travelling with his parents on a well-equipped whale expedition boat, sponsored by an American – who later turns out to work for the American navy.

This evasion of sensitive issues is one of the particularities of Icelandic children's books. A researcher of culture through children's books must be aware of their controversy – that they only offer an emic view, which may be opposed to the etic analysis. At the same time as almost nine out of ten Icelanders support killing whales, Icelandic children's books glorify the species – almost attributing human qualities to their whale characters.¹¹ It is also noteworthy, as stated above, that in the late 1960s, when British frigates had been threatening Icelandic coast guard ships, a boy's brave actions in an Icelandic children's book save the whole crew of a British fishing boat. One must be aware that what we find in children's books may be just "edited" reflections of culture, not the full compass of the "true" culture itself.

I was not aware of any particular cases of a parallel evasion of issues in English children's books. The English may not need, like the Icelanders do, to tell themselves over and over that they are they are a perfect nation. The Icelanders simply have to, because of their marginal position in the world. English children's books writers are not afraid of mentioning drinking or smoking. In *Dance on my Grave*, Barry's mother puts out beer for the boys to drink (Chambers 1982, 40). Gemma in Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996) actually

¹¹ The two major whale characters in *Navigi a hvalaslod* ("In the Trail of Whales" Jonsson 1998) are, for instance, named after the first humans according to Norse mythology, Askur and Embla.

likes selling her body, at least for a while. When the baby comes back from hospital in David Almond's *Skellig*, Michael's father lets him have swigs of his beer – although the boy seems hardly ten (Almond 1998, 168). Bill Coward in *The Nature of the Beast*, who seems no more than twelve, comments:

Anyway, we spent this pretty miserable day in Chunder's shed, not talking much, just smoking our heads off. Well you can't really smoke your head off with eight fags, I suppose, but neither Mick nor me are great smokers. I'm not bothered one way or the other, and I shan't smoke when I grow up. But we were that fed up we smoked the lot.

(Howker 1985, 21)

The fact that a number of young people smoke and drink needs no veiling in English society: it is a society which either has less to hide than the Icelandic nation or elects to admit to some unacceptable social behaviour.

This discussion of drinking and smoking in English and Icelandic children's books does not mean that these "vices" (or virtues) are national values or myths, passed through children's literature. It only goes to show that most of the time, *preferred* values are passed through children's literature; the way things should be instead of the way things are. Icelanders go further in this process than the English, and I would argue that the reason for such "amendments" in Icelandic children's books as shown above ("editing out" alcohol and tobacco) derives from a particular Icelandic value. Because of the Icelanders' fatalistic belief (which will be discussed in the next chapter), they believe that if things are stated, they will come true. An example from Olafur H. Simonarson's *Gauragangur* ("All Hell Loose" 1988) goes a long way towards explaining this Icelandic value. The protagonist's mother is very "typically" Icelandic and in fact she could be considered to be a living embracement of Icelandic national virtues (and vices). On Christmas Eve, which is when Icelanders start celebrating Christmas, she is at the top of the world:

Mother had quite a few fixed ideas and one of them was this: everyone should be good. We decide to be good and blessed and then we are good and blessed. A group of ptarmigans in the old Rafha stove, freshly cooked red cabbage, Christmas ale, a starched white tablecloth, red napkins, and mother grows wings. She flutters all over the kitchen, utterly convinced that we are good people and the Earth, not

to mention Iceland, is the very best place in the whole universe. Jesus and his Father have, of course, a certain preference for this wacky Viking nation and everything must turn for the better from now on to eternity, Amen.

(My transl., Simonarson 1988, 165)

The steadfast belief that everything will turn for the better if only you believe in it and keep telling yourself and others that everything is good and blessed is a relevant part of the Icelandic identity.

4.4. Norms, Normality and Reality

Mr and Mrs Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.

(Rowling 1997, 7)

As Patrick Wright pointed out in a quote at the beginning of this chapter, the social world awaits the individual who is born into it, and it immediately places demands on the new member. He or she has to adapt to the “norms” already accepted by the society, in order to be a “normal” member with an acknowledged identity. Children are generally very much concerned with fitting into the society they live in, to be considered “normal”, and they have a need to know what is “reality” and what is not. What could be considered “normal” in one country may not be viewed as such in another country. Thus, the defined (or not always defined) norms, normality and “reality” of the society in question have a bearing on the formation and continuation of national identity as opposed to other national identities. Children’s books have an important function in defining roles and norms; they help children to establish a notion of what is considered normal in their society, and concurrently, they reflect the identity crises that young people have to face at a given time.

Although identity is not as solid as it used to be – some consider it “multiple”, “melted”, and subject to change – it is still social and other related, as Douglas Kellner points out:

Theorists of identity from Hegel through G.H. Mead have often characterized personal identity in terms of mutual recognition, as if one’s identity depended on recognition from others combined with self-validation of this recognition. Yet the forms of identity in modernity are also relatively substantial and fixed; identity still comes from a circumscribed set of roles and norms: one is a mother, a son, a Texan, a Scot, a professor, a socialist, a Catholic, a lesbian – or rather a

combination of these social roles and possibilities. Identities are thus still relatively fixed and limited, though the boundaries of possible identities, of new identities, are continually expanding.

(Kellner 1995, 231)

Kellner goes on to say that “there is still a structure of interaction with socially defined and available roles, norms, customs, and expectations,” which one must choose from in order to gain identity “in a complex process of mutual recognition” (Kellner 1995, 231). We gain recognition from other members of our society by adhering to what is considered “normal” by our nation: it is a “mutual recognition”. Although children are infatuated with the “unreal”, as in *The Witches* (Dahl 1983), and with “abnormal” magic, as for example in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling 1997), they seek stability, they want to have some “reality”, something “normal” to return to: a stable existence.

Child characters in both English and Icelandic children’s books look for normality: most of them want to “fit” in, have a “normal” home and a “normal” family. When Tam of Melvin Burgess’ *An Angel for May* (1992) has travelled to the same geographical place in the past, the local people think he is a foreign spy. “He was all wrong – wrong face, wrong voice, wrong clothes. He moved wrong, he thought wrong. Truly, Tam was lost in another world” (Burgess 1992, 59). Tam is terrified what they will do to him because he is not “normal”. A quest for normality is parodied in Sylvia Waugh’s *The Mennyns* (1993). The Mennyns are rag dolls that live on in their maker’s Victorian house after she dies. They know they are dolls, but they pretend to have a human identity. Living as an extended family, including a granny who skilfully knits, a patriarch grandfather, a caring mother, and a cheeky teenager, the Mennyns have managed to “pretend” for 40 years, fooling their neighbours and deceiving the community they live in. They “pretend” to have tea, and one of them pretends to be a neighbour, hiding in a closet in between visits. Waugh manages to show that things are not really what they seem to be on the surface, that the border between “real” and “make-believe” is thin. Similarly, Geraldine McCaughrean portrays in *A Pack of Lies* (1988) how difficult it is for young people to distinguish between what is “real” and what is not. Ailsa lives alone with her mother over their

antique shop. One day a mysterious man who calls himself MCC Berkshire shows up, moves into the shop and baffles the girl, her mother, and a number of buyers, with his fascinating stories. Ailsa wonders more and more if the man is real or not: if he is just a figment of her imagination. "It couldn't be. He existed. She had touched him. He had to exist. Other people had seen him. . . . Who could she run to and demand proof of his existence?" (McCaughrean 1988, 163).

Children are the recipients of several of packs of lies: "reality" is multi-faceted, sometimes manufactured and hard to detect, as Anthony Weir points out in an on-line article, "Time and Place: The TV of Our Minds":

Our concept of reality is artificial and culture-bound. We imagine the 'real' world to be a projection of our egos which in turn are formed by the public world which controls economies and families alike. The 'real' world for us at the end of the twentieth century is the world of jobs and 'leisure', money and progress, success (by which we mean fame) and a whole pile of comparatively recent cultural baggage. It is a matter of 'education': the process of leading us out of any kind of inner awareness - which is why so many adolescents want to 'get out of their heads': they feel that their heads are not their own. 'Reality' is simply a matter of convention, like good manners and wearing particular kinds of clothes.

(Weir 1996)

Young Cassy in Gillian Cross's *Wolf* (1990) feels her head is not her own and finds it hard to come to terms with her awful reality in a world which seems to be spinning too fast. When asked by her mother's boyfriend, Robert, what she considers to be real life, she says that it is doing "Ordinary things. . . . And school and shopping and cleaning." Robert retorts: "And nice fitted kitchens? Fathers who go out to work and mothers who stay at home and do the cooking?" (Cross 1990, 78). He criticizes how ideology can distort one's concept of reality. Robert wants Cassy to play a pig in his amateur theatre; he pushes her, telling her she has to make a living. Cassy is furious: "I have to be here, in this-this *slum*, with you and Goldie. Not having proper meals. Not sleeping in a proper bed. Not behaving like a real person at all" (Cross 1990, 81). But being a real person is taking the part of the pig, assigned to her: she has to accept that this is her reality. Robert tells her: "If things are there, you have to admit it in the end" (Cross 1990, 82). In Cassy's turbulent

world, there is no such thing as normality: she has to adapt to the “reality” created by her irresponsible mother and her mother’s wolfish boyfriend.

When children conceive that the world is changing around them, their world falls apart, and they get “homesick for common sense” as Cassy in *Wolf* (Cross 1990, 107). Postmodern children need to worry about a whole lot of things: if their families will fall apart; if the whole world will fall apart. In Philip Pullman’s *The Subtle Knife* (1997), Lyra, who lives in a parallel world to ours, and Will, who comes from our world, are discussing current affairs:

‘I been cold plenty of times,’ Lyra said, to take her mind of the pursuers, ‘but I en’t been this hot, ever. Is it this hot in your world?’

‘Not where I used to live. Not normally. But the climate’s been changing. The summers are hotter than they used to be. They say that people have been interfering with the atmosphere by putting chemicals in it and the weather’s going out of control.’

‘Yeah, well they have,’ said Lyra, ‘and it is. And we’re here in the middle of it.’

(Pullman 1997, 322-3)

A changing climate upsets the reality of English children: flooded rivers and snowless winters indicate a changing world. Changes in family patterns and an upset family life also makes children thirst for what they have constructed as “normality”. The world of little Michael in David Almond’s *Skellig* (1998) is upset because his baby sister is ill and possibly dying. He cannot play “normally” with his friends: “I just wanted them to go away. I wanted them to stay. I wanted to be able to play like I used to. I wanted things to be just the way they used to be” (Almond 1998, 96). The identity that Michael has constructed, based on the “reality” of his mother, his father and the little baby sister, is losing ground: that identity is falling apart and the boy is desperate for a normal world.

Young characters in Icelandic children’s books also have problems in telling between the real and “unreal” and coming to terms with the norms that await them, although their reality is never as fractured and ghastly as Cassy’s reality in *Wolf* (Cross 1990). Little Loa-Loa’s reality in Gudrun Helgadóttir’s *Saman í hring* (“Together in a Circle, 1986) is

shaking after Birgir Bjorn dies. He was the son of a neighbour and dear friend to her sister, Heida:

Never in her life had she hurt so strangely. It was like there was nothing left in her head. Up till now, Loa-Loa had always wanted things to remain as they had been and that was fine for her. Now, nothing was fine. . . . This couldn't be right. This was not the way the world was and that's why it had to be different. Like it was. Like it had been.

(My transl., Helgadóttir 1986, 58)

As in most Icelandic children's books, the world for Loa-Loa turns back to normal: there is always a hint of optimism in them, even when tragedy has struck.

The presence of the U.S. navy upset a number of Icelanders during the 1960s and 1970s. Those that rebelled against the military company claimed that Icelandic culture was no longer their own, and that the Americans were distorting Icelandic reality with their American consumer culture. Whether it can be traced to the presence of the Americans or not, Icelandic culture has become very consumerist, resulting in an onslaught of media culture. Douglas Kellner outlines this kind of a development:

Once upon a time, it was who you were, what you did, what kind of a person you were – your moral, political, and existential choices and commitments, which constituted individual identity. But today it is how you look, your image, your style, and how you appear that constitutes identity. And it is media culture that more and more provides the materials and resources to constitute identities.

(Kellner 1995, 259)

For these reasons, young people have difficulties in constructing an image which is their own, a "real" image – and not a fictional construct. Icelandic writer Olafur H. Simonarson shows immense sympathy with such fictional identities in *Gauragangur* ("All Hell Loose" 1988), a sharp critique on the consumer industry, which makes young people doubt whether they are actually taking part in a movie or living in "reality". Ormur, the protagonist, is saying goodbye to Linda, his girlfriend, who is standing on the front steps of her house, watching him walk down the street. He shouts "Merry Christmas!" to her, and she shouts back, "Merry Christmas, Ormur!":

I suspected that we were acting in a third-rate American Christmas movie; all we needed was the stray dog and some poor children selling matches.

– You'll come to the cabin after the holidays, she shouted behind me.

Instinctively I did as the American Christmas movie director told me to, I turned around, smiled a brilliant-white toothpaste-smile, waved, and sent a hail of finger-kisses in her direction.

(My transl., Simonarson 1988, 167)

Ormur does not feel in control of his own life: he feels directed by the media.

The internalisation and appropriation of “norms” are complicated for both Icelandic and English and Icelandic children because “norms” have been distorted by the media culture. As a small country, Iceland is more vulnerable to enormous influences from “larger” nations, especially America and the UK. The majority of sitcoms and films on Icelandic television are either American or British. Like many other countries in the world, Iceland has been exposed to heavy “Macdonaldization”, which has perhaps more effect on Icelandic culture than for instance British culture, because the whole mammoth onslaught is in English: a “foreign” language. Such problems will be surveyed in the discussion of language preservation in Chapter 8. The next two sections centre on how institutions are displayed in English and Icelandic children’s books and what they have to do with national identity

4.5. Institutions and English Children’s Books

One of the major changes which took place in both English and Icelandic society in the 20th century was the shift of responsibility from family and friends to public institutions. Whereas earlier, the extended family and a circle of neighbours and friends upheld the society’s support system for those in need, the old and the sick, institutions took over as the 20th century wore on. They have to a great degree taken over caring for children, as well as their education, which has been increasing, both in terms of hours per day, days per year, and years per child.

The link between caring for those in need, employment and education on the one hand, and national identity on the other, is clear from the following example. Kevin Davey

refers to one of the first speeches of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair as leader to the Labour Party conference, where he envisioned a nation for all the people:

Where your child in distress is my child, your parent ill and in pain, is my parent;
your friend unemployed or helpless, my friend; your neighbour, my neighbour.
That is the true patriotism of a nation.

(Blair 1996, 71; Davey 1999, 6)

As I understand Mr. Blair's words, we do not personally want to do these things: we do not have the time or resources to take other people's children and care for them; we do not tend to their parents when they are ill; we do not provide work for the unemployed friend or help for the helpless, and we hardly know our neighbour's name. However, we have entered into a national bond with our nameless neighbours to establish and maintain institutions to take care of children, the sick, the elderly, unemployed and helpless people of our society. The English political and social system builds the expectation in the nation that the National Department for Education and Employment, the NHS and the social services to take care of those needs.

According to Mr. Tony Blair, "the true patriotism" of a nation shows itself in its people's willingness to help each other when in need. Such loyalty is never as clearly manifested as during times when the nation is threatened. English children's books set before, during, or shortly after World War II look back nostalgically to when people helped each other in times of trouble. Nameless, faceless institutions have now taken over social aid – and a certain degree of resentment against these is detectable in a number of English children's books of the last decades of the 20th century. One of the pre-war books that look back to when family bonds were stronger is Nina Bawden's *The Peppermint Pig* (1975). Emily Greengrass's husband has gone to America to look for work, and she goes with her four children to Norfolk to live with his two sisters, who take care of their absent brother's family. In *Goodnight Mister Tom* (Magorian 1981), set during World War II, the local people help Mister Tom to care for the young evacuee by knitting him a sweater and providing medical help. Granted, evacuee books, such as *Goodnight Mister Tom* and *Carrie's War* (Bawden 1973) are a prime example of the "national bond" – as they portray

how the English country people took care of the English city people's children during the war.

As the English nation has grown, the big cities have become more “inhuman”, and as there has not been a war threatening their safety, the English people have drifted apart. As mentioned earlier, the population density in Iceland in 1997 was three people to each square kilometre as opposed to two hundred and forty people in the United Kingdom (CyberSchoolBus 2001). Whereas one may feel cared for in a small community, one is at a risk of becoming isolated and “forgotten” in a larger community. The more people, the less they care about each other, as Leon Garfield's *John Diamond*, set in 18th century England, shows. Young William has grown up in Hertford and comes to London for the first time. He has never seen so many people:

In Hertford, and on the coach, I'd been frightened that everybody knew me and knew what I was doing. Here I was even more frightened because nobody knew me and nobody cared what I was doing.

(Garfield 1980, 37)

With increased urbanisation and mass population the fear of disappearing into the crowd becomes more intensive. Instead of knowing everyone and caring about everyone, people become part of a “system” – a large, shadowy octopus.

The representatives of the “system” – social services and education authorities in particular – are portrayed very negatively in many of the English books covered here: they are the nuisances threatening the freedom and individuality of the characters. Disapproval of social bureaucracy can be found in Aidan Chambers' *Dance on my Grave*, when a social worker bullies Hal to work with her or he will suffer the consequences:

That he could be sent to a Detention Centre and be kept there while the police, psychiatrists and other social workers looked into his case. He might get fined. He might be thought in need of medical treatment and then a Supervision Order would be made and the treatment specified, and he would have to attend an appropriate hospital.

(Chambers 1982, 26)

Hal would be thrown from his existence as an individual into the haze of the system. Later on, Ozzie, Hal's teacher says to a social worker: "Wasn't this what social workers did—keep files on people? How else could they compile their reports?" (Chambers 1982, 123). A similar criticism can be detected in Janni Howker's *The Nature of the Beast*; Oggy the teacher tells young Bill to bring a "sick note" to school. Bill asks why, and Oggy replies: "You've ever heard of social workers?" (Howker 1985, 60). Likewise, Will Parry in Philip Pullman's *The Subtle Knife* is petrified that social workers could find him out and take his mother away: "What Will himself feared more than anything else was that the authorities would find out about her, and take her away, and put him in a home among strangers" (Pullman 1997, 11).

I mentioned in Chapter 3 that the trend in England from the mid-eighties onward was to criticise the ineptness of the social services. By focusing on the family as a central unit of the community and cutting down social support, Thatcherism had various consequences. In an article looking back on Thatcherism, Gavin Kelly comments:

Margaret Thatcher made two significant contributions to poverty in the UK. She massively increased it, leaving at the end of the Conservative tenure one in three children living in households with less than half the average income (the official definition of poverty). Then she said it did not exist.

(Kelly 1999)

Poverty led to homelessness and people who had been cared for by institutions were dumped back into the community. Melvin Burgess' *An Angel for May* (1992) attacks authorities for not taking care of the old and the sick. Mrs. Caradine, a Health worker, says about Rosey, an old, homeless woman: "Another victim of 'back into the community'. . . . Dumping people out on the streets, more like it" (Burgess 1992, 22). Mrs. Caradine recalls some programme on television about a girl who got pregnant and spent 50 years in a mental home. "'No nice safe locked room, no medication – having to cope for herself and she can't. So much for progress'" (Burgess 1992, 23). Anne Fine's *The Tulip Touch* (1996) provides another example of this critique. When Natalie tells her father about Tulip's home, which is hardly a home, he says that the Pierces have had social workers

round there time and time again (Fine 1996, 167). Yet it seems that Tulip's parents were not "bad enough". Natalie's father continues: "It has to be a whole lot worse than bad to count as unbearable" (167). Natalie is furious; she wants to scream at her father that she has no power to change things, that they have, but do not bother (Fine 1996, 168). Because social workers have failed, Tulip has become an unloved outcast of society and she poses a threat to the material comforts of those that are inside society: she sets the Palace, Natalie's home, on fire. Icelandic children's books writers are much more optimistic about institutional care.

4.6. Institutions and Icelandic Children's Books

Turning the attention to criticism of social workers in Icelandic children's books, I noticed one main difference: There is far less condemnation. Icelanders do not criticise "progress"; if there is the occasional portrayal of hunger or poverty, it is something which belongs to the past, to "the old days", when the Icelandic people were poor and suffering, or to other countries. Icelanders tell their children stories about the old days or starving children in other countries because they want their children to appreciate the material comfort and security the new generations take for granted. As an example, the teacher in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bjartir dagar* ("Sunny Days" 1976) tells the children to read a story called "Vistaskipti" ("Trading Places") by Icelandic author Einar H. Kvaran. He points out that the orphan in this story is no rare exception:

In former times many orphaned children had a life like his, even worse. . . . Hard work, lack of education and scorn, which children in the old days often had to endure and impeded their natural development, was now history.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1976, 109)

Numerous other children's books, such as Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar strond* ("Childhood's Coast" 1973) and Gudrun Helgadóttir's trilogy (1983, 1986, 1987) also look back to the days when Icelandic people were starving. When Benni in Gunnhildur Hrólfssdóttir's *Thad sem enginn ser* ("What No-One Can See" 1998) is feeling depressed because of his circumstances, his mother tells him:

At least we have each other. You should think about all the poor children in foreign countries, how badly they are off. They don't even have a roof over their head and perhaps no father or mother and nothing to eat. Mother was moved and wiped off the tears that were running down her cheek.

(My transl., Hrolfsdottir 1998, 52-53)

Hunger or extreme poverty is almost unknown in modern Iceland, or so we Icelanders want to think. Again, there is the notion of regenerative ideology, of believing in the supremacy of the Icelandic nation. When someone *has* social problems in Icelandic children's books, people take matters into their own hands instead of criticizing the social services. The Icelandic people still believe in the extended family: caring for others has not completely been handed over to institutions.

Social workers in Icelandic children's books are not portrayed as cruel or threatening as their English colleagues. Palli in Dora Stefansdottir's *Breidholtsstrakur fer í sveit* has never heard of the social services, so Magnus explains to him: "It's a sort of an institution in Reykjavik which places children with single mothers on farms for the summer" ("A Suburban Boy in the Country" Stefansdottir 1985). Having a single mother, Palli realises why he gets to spend his afternoons in school care. "He'd heard some of the grown-ups argue disdainfully that everything was done for children like him. It's a scandal how much is provided free for these single parents" (Stefansdottir 1985, 22). Palli is a recipient of social help, but he has no idea. Oli, a boy of fifteen in Larus Mar Bjornsson's *K/K Keflavikurdagar/Keflavikurnaetur* ("K/K Keflavik Days/Keflavik Nights" 1995), takes immediately to his teacher, Ari – who happens to be a social worker. Ari tells the boy, who had been heading for trouble, that he is very bright; that he is one of the kids that have got lost in the school system. Their collaboration goes unbelievably smoothly from the very beginning. "You haven't had the help you need," the social worker says, and gives the young man a "Goal Achievement Contract", which the boy signs eagerly (Bjornsson 1995, 44). When Laufey in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Thad sem enginn ser* ("What No-One Can See" Hrolfsdottir 1998) gets into trouble, she starts going to a youth shelter. There is immediate friendship between her and the leading woman at the shelter, a

social worker. Laufey looks forward to every meeting at the shelter and goes on outings and expeditions with other troubled kids that greet her with a smile each time they meet. They become, in a manner of speaking, part of her “extended family”.

Icelandic children’s books portray a very strong bond between the people: the “network” of family, friends and acquaintances that care about an individual’s welfare seems much bigger and more resilient than in English children’s books. Gudrun Petursdottir, a presidential candidate who travelled all over Iceland in the spring of 1996, mentions this fact:

And this is the underlying network everywhere in our society and it is seldom mentioned, but I think it is an important element in our national identity. We practically *know* each other, if not directly, then indirectly, both in Iceland and when abroad.

(My transl., Arnason, 1997)

This network is not mentioned directly in Icelandic children’s books, but it is obviously entrenched and taken for granted in most of them. Although Logi, the sixteen-year-old hero in Gudjon Sveinsson’s *Ort rennur aeskublod* (“Young Blood Flows Fast” 1972) decides to leave home and try the adventurous life of a sailor, he picks a boat where his uncle is one of the crew. And even though Emil in Gudmundur Olafsson’s *Emil og Skundi* (“Emil and Skundi” 1986) runs away from home, he does so with the intention of going to his grandfather’s place to stay. When 15-year-old Hakon’s father in *Brak og brestir* (“Squieking and Screeching” Jonsson 1993) loses his work in Reykjavik, the boy and his father move to a small town to live with his uncle. The “networking” acts as a safeguard when things go wrong. Some children’s books look nostalgically to the time when the network involved a lot more people – when the whole village or town seemed to care about one’s welfare. The old man in Thorvaldur Saemundsson’s *Bernskunnar strond* is very poor and has only a small piece of land, but he can borrow meadows from his neighbours to harvest for a nominal fee (“Childhood’s Coast” 1973, 31). The partaking in other people’s joys and sorrows is an important element in the maintenance of the “network”; Pall H. Jonsson’s *Berjabitur* (“Berry-Picker” 1978) explains why people in the

country like to listen in on other people's conversations (which was possible before telephone lines were closed):

Because the people in the country are good people who love to keep watch on how things are going on each farm, to know whose feet are hurting and who suffers from rheumatism. And they feel grief for those that are in pain, and joy for those that are doing well.

(My transl., Jonsson 1978, 33)

In Elisabet Thorgeirsdottir's short story, "Sjorinn", the whole village takes part in the grief when a boat is lost:

Three days later they were considered lost at sea. Almost all of the village people attended the memorial service in the church. The sailors marched to the sailor memorial before the ceremony, with the Icelandic flag and the Seaman's Association flag in the front. The statue has this inscription: "In honour of those that are lost, in blessing of those that venture to the sea."

(My transl., Thorgeirsdottir 1985, 50)

Likewise, when the family of Gudrun Helgadóttir's trilogy is starving while the father is out on the sea, the village people help out and give his wife and children fish and *slatur* – which is similar to haggis (Helgadóttir 1983, 1986, 1987).

The idea of helping someone in trouble is romanticized in Icelandic children's books, often unrealistically. *Benjamin dufa* portrays a group of boys who collect enough money to rebuild an old woman's house after it has burned down ("Benjamin Dove" Erlingsson 1992). Helgi's co-workers in *Tilbuinn undir treverk* contribute to bring him back the horse which constitutes his only, and most sentimental, tie to the farm he lost before being forced to move to Reykjavik ("Ready for Woodwork" Helgason 1998). The extended family in Steinunn Sigurdardóttir's *Fraenkuturninn* ("The Auntie Tower" 1998), consisting of a boy, his parents and his two aunts, helps a homeless man by providing him with food and shelter, and finding him a job.

Saying that Icelanders are in general more willing to help other people than the English may sound a crude presumption. However, a study designed by EVSSG (The European Value Systems Study Group) shows that there may be some truth in this statement. This was a cross-national survey of human values, carried out by the Gallup Institute in Europe

in 1981, and by 1984, it had been conducted in over 20 countries all over the world. The study's findings are imperative for my research because it involves a "measurement", if you wish, of some fundamental values in both Britain and Iceland – although it must be considered that a survey can never give a definitive answer to the questions asked, just an indication. I have relied on *Contrasting Values in Western Europe* (Harding, et al. 1986) for some of the study's findings, but as the figures from Iceland are not included in this book, I quote a report written and published in Iceland by Stefan Olafsson, titled *Hvernig eru Íslendingar?* ("What are Icelanders like?" Olafsson 1985) for the Icelandic outcome. Olafsson shows the comparison between Iceland and Britain as regards the willingness to sacrifice one's own life (Olafsson 1985, 64):

	Nothing is worth risking your life for it	To save a human life is worth risking your own life
Iceland	42%	41%
Britain	60%	20%

Icelanders scored highest of the nations involved for risking their life in order to save another life. They also seem to partake more willingly in charity work than the British. People were asked if they belonged to some charities or clubs (Olafsson 1985, 65) :

	Charities	Youth clubs (the scouts, sports clubs, youth clubs, etc.)
Iceland	21%	19%
Britain	9%	7%

Olafsson points out that because of natural conditions in Iceland, a large number of people are involved in rescue groups, e.g. mountain and sea rescue teams.

The Icelandic preference for partaking in a rescue mission at the risk of one's own life is a common occurrence in Icelandic children's books. In Eiríkur Sigurdsson's *Strakar í Straumey* ("Boys in the Isle of Straum" 1969), quite a few men risk their life in order to save the crew of an English trawler. Twelve-year-old Sjonni in Karl Helgason's *Í þokahorninu* ("That Extra Something" 1990) risks his life rescuing his sister and the heroic deed gets him accepted into the "Hero-Climber Society" on Iceland's national

holiday, June 17th. Hakon, 15 years old, in Elias S. Jonsson's *Brak og brestir* ("Squeaking and Screeching" 1993), joins a rescue mission to save two boys who have fallen into a glacier crag, at a risk to his own life. These samples illustrate how the Icelanders rely on each other in the face of adversity.

The main difference between the viewpoint towards social institutions and the family in English and Icelandic children's books is distrust versus trust. The following position can be extrapolated from the evidence gathered in this research, i.e. that English children's books show an individual who has to rely on his or her own skills to find a foothold in a fractured world. Frequently, he or she stands alone, without any support from the family. On the other hand, children in Icelandic children's books rely on family bonds and the support of the "network" to which they belong, whether close to or far away from home. Whereas children in English books face adversities or difficulties that make them more independent and stronger as individuals, children in Icelandic children's books perform heroic deeds in order to gain recognition from the community. The characters in both English and Icelandic children's books, with their actions and reactions, reflect the attitude of the nation towards external realities. The English nation has, through decolonisation and cultural diversity, attained a fractured vision of itself, reflected in the uncertain world-view of its child characters, who depend on themselves only. Conversely, the Icelandic nation has a more holistic view of itself as a close-knit community, where people are there for each other when needed. According to children's books, English society has, if you wish, entered a post-modern stage, while Icelandic society still exists with a state of social unity. Whereas English society criticizes itself and admits its flaws, Icelandic society stands firm in its own superiority and flawlessness. As an example, the Icelanders will rarely admit that there are any class or regional distinctions in their society. The next section surveys the role of language in the formation of identity, and its relation to class and region in England and Iceland.

4.7. Language

What the eye is to the lover – that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed.

(Anderson 1983, 140)

The appropriation of language is one of Patrick Wright's stages of identity listed at the beginning of this chapter. A nation's new members have to learn and internalise the language already at hand in the society into which he or she was born. As Benedict Anderson states, this language is encountered at the mother's knee and will follow a person to the grave. P. W. Preston points out that "The sets of social relationships which constitute identity are understood within language," adding that "Identity is not fixed, it has no essence, it does not reside in any given body of texts or symbols or sacred sites. It is carried in language and made and remade in routine social practice" (Preston 1997, 49). Identity begins with language, regardless of who you are, as Gudrun Helgadóttir humorously points out in *Saman í hring* ("Together in a Circle" 1986), set during WWII. An Icelandic woman in seven-year-old Loa-Loa's town has just had a baby called Sammy, fathered by a black American soldier. Loa-Loa ponders whether little Sammy will talk a foreign language when he starts speaking because Mrs. Pettersen, who comes from Sweden, and the nuns, who come from France, talk a foreign language even though they live in Iceland.

Loa-Loa wondered a whole lot about this. She thought about how strange it would be if perhaps a newborn coal-black Negro or Indian or Chinese would come to Iceland: they would simply talk Icelandic when they started to speak. Just like she did. It had never before occurred to her that an Icelandic could have a black or a Chinese-like face.

(My transl., Helgadóttir 1986, 97)

One is not born with language: it is attained, but as it grows on one it becomes part of one's identity, and a link to the people who share it. The fact that the "mother language" is learned by mother's knee is important, because no other language, which the individual may learn in his life, will ever replace the thoughts and feelings inspired by the mother

language. Internalising the language, in England, also means obtaining an identity in the English society, because the English language is loaded with social and regional implications.

Language will not be discussed in this section from a linguistic viewpoint, but for its symbolic value in the formation and sustenance of national identity. However questionable the associations between language and identity may be, it cannot be denied that we use language to come to terms with everyday life, to cope with our environment, and to communicate with other members of our society. People's thought-patterns are interlocked with the language of their community and the environment affects both, i.e. the landscape and the weather.

How much thought-patterns are related to language is, for example, revealed by the nation's vocabulary. J. Edward Chamberlin points out that aboriginal people in Canada "talk about subsistence rather than survival, and by it they mean not the bare minimum for getting by but everything that is essential to their wellbeing, including spiritual as well as material needs" (Chamberlin 1993, 191). Smilla, the heroine of Danish writer Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* knows more than thirteen words for snow: she requires that vocabulary to cope with the landscapes of Greenland (Høeg 1993). Whereas the plant with the Latin name *N. pseudonarcissus* is called a daffodil in England, the Icelanders know it as *paskalilja* or "Easter-lily" because it flowers at Easter time in the cold climate of Iceland – a month or two later than in England. Even when two nations speak the same language, words can have different meanings: "the bush" has a different meaning in Australia and England, as it carries a symbolic meaning for the Australian people. Our naming of things depends on our community's worldview. Thus, language encapsulates how a community perceives its surroundings, its expressions are part of its system of meaning.

Language, as Itamar Even-Zohar points out in “Language Conflict and National Identity,” has a variety of functions:

Language is not only a vehicle of interaction, not only a vehicle of intercommunication, not only a practical tool for state administration in modern or in ancient times; but also a vehicle of symbolic value. By adopting a certain language, a certain population or a certain group in society declares what identity it wants to show to itself as well as to the rest of the world.

(Even-Zohar 1986, 126)

Even-Zohar adds that there is a significant difference between the first and the second instance. A language used as a vehicle for communication is a language used “bona fide” by various individuals and groups. “But the language that becomes a vehicle of semiotic ideology has, more often than not throughout history, actually constructed additional cultural matter” (*ibid*, 126). Hence, a gap appears between the standard language and the spoken language. Conflicts have emerged worldwide about what language or languages should be obligatory to the nation and which varieties of the language should be supported and which rejected. Sometimes the varieties are so dissimilar that people from one region can hardly understand their neighbours. Even-Zohar quotes as a German example that a Bavarian could barely comprehend Plattdeutsch, and as an example from Denmark (which consists of Jutland, a peninsula, and two main islands, Fyn and Zealand), that people from Jutland do not automatically understand their neighbours from Zealand. Such difficulties could remain on the personal or social level. However, when one of the varieties of language is chosen by authorities, conflict occurs; when a standard is set, those that do not know the standard become underprivileged and culturally displaced.

England is one of the countries where a “standard” language is the language of the privileged, and “non-standard” dialects become subservient. When I first came to England to study for my M.A. at the University of Liverpool, I shared a flat with seven other students. One of them, James, a young Englishman, spoke what to me was “perfect” English: it was the English I had been striving to speak for years, during long hours in the language lab; it was the English that we in Iceland call “BBC English” – the English our teachers played for us on tape, the English of documentaries on TV, movies based on Jane

Austen novels and afternoon teas on the lawn. One day young James came home with bandages on his head, a black eye, and puffed lips. He told me that three young men from the local area had attacked him outside a phone booth because he had, after a twenty-minute wait, asked one of them politely if the phone call would take much longer. This was the third time in one year, he said, that he had been assaulted because of his “public school accent”.

James’ story puzzled me: to begin with, I thought a *public* school was opposed to *private*, so I could not understand why they would despise him for being one of the common people. Besides, coming from Iceland, I had no idea how loaded language is for the English: with region, class and ethnicity. Now, five years later, after some studying of English culture, I know that a public school is a private school, and that speaking Standard English (which to me was “perfect” English) sets one apart from the majority of the nation. It is only a privilege among the privileged: on the “outside” it is a setback. Now I know that paradoxes and hidden contradictions within language usage and the relationship to “deeper” notions of national culture are the complexities which are omitted from guidebooks for foreign visitors.

A form of Standard English has been maintained in England; it is alluded to as “Oxford English” or “BBC English”, or just plain “posh” – but because of all the non-standard, or regional varieties, this one form of English cannot be said to officially represent the national language, as Anthony Easthope points out:

Standard English becomes the vehicle of the English literary canon which . . . accordingly would prove its Englishness because it is in Standard English.

But if we thought the national language as Standard English was sufficient to define national identity we would be stuck with an idea of nation as partial and imposed hegemony corresponding to the theoretical error of understanding nation as class dominance.

(Easthope 1999, 25)

Indeed, Standard English has been associated with class and the “finest” schools and places, such as Oxford, and such a narrow section of English society cannot be singled out

to represent the nation. Because Standard English has been maintained and preserved by the higher classes and by educated people from the “old” schools, it has acquired negative associations in the eyes of the common people. A large number of the English public, “non-standard” English speakers, feel disassociated from this elevated form of “Englishness” and consider that Standard English as a language has little to do with their national identity.

In England, class and regional differences can easily be exposed in dialogue, as, for example, texts in children’s books show. A website on the Internet offers a free, instant translation of your text into a variety of accents: “Yorkshire”, “Cockney”, “Brummie”, “Scouse”, “Geordie” or “Jolly Well Spoken”. Keeping in mind the equality of all dialects, the website’s legal disclaimer states: “It does not make fun of cultural dialects; rather, it mines humour that may be found when certain English passages are expressed in a dialect we are not used to hearing it in. By no means is whoohoo.co.uk intended to ridicule or demean” (Whoohoo 2001). While the English children’s books covered here are all written in “Standard” English, a large number of them have the characters’ dialogue “translated” into local dialects. The difference in dialects is apparent in Leon Garfield’s *John Diamond* when young William from Hertford comes to London to settle affairs for his dead father. The London boys, who say “muvver” for mother, mimic William when he says “mother”, saying: “It’s ‘is muTHer’s muTHer!” (Garfield 1980, 94). It can also be seen in Alan’s speech in Berlie Doherty’s *Granny was a Buffer Girl*, “Gi’e o’er preenin’ thissen, tha great peacock!” and in the Coastguard’s talk in Robert Westall’s *The Kingdom by the Sea*, who says “Aah didn’t tell me Mam all Aah was doing when Aah was young either,” and a number of other books (Doherty 1986, 49; Westall 1990, 30). Sometimes class or regional differences need no transcribing, as when Edmund of C. S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* begins most of his sentences with “I say” (Lewis 1998, 56), or when John Rowe Townsend’s children in *Gumble’s Yard* refer to the police or social services as “the Cruelty” (Townsend 1961, 23).

English people can immediately tell to which class a person belongs, and a stranger can be classified accordingly. Having dealt with Hagrid the Keeper of the Keys, Harry Potter from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* goes to Madam Malkin's shop to select a robe. He meets a boy there (Draco Malfoy, as it turns out), who says of Hagrid: "He's a sort of servant, isn't he?" (Rowling 1997, 60). The English reader already knew this fact from Hagrid's accent – although such intricacies cannot be conveyed in the Icelandic translation, for example. The English association with class is even transferred to remote China, in Peter Dickinson's *Tulku*, when Theodore's missionary father cannot hide his social class when speaking Chinese. Theodore comments: "(A visiting Baptist had once told Father that he spoke Chinese languages as though he was wearing native clothes but had forgotten to remove his tall hat)" (Dickinson 1979, 7). Theodore sees Mrs. Jones, another character in the same story, for the first time when she comes riding down a slope with an escort of natives. Theodore tries to locate her in the world:

English, he thought, though she spoke differently from the few English missionaries he had met, with her tinny vowels and lack of aitches. She seemed to be rich. She was wicked – a blasphemer, who had also laughed at the exposed buttocks of her porters. Shameless. But the few words she had spoken to Theodore, like the gesture he had just observed, gave him a sense of somebody full of life and intelligence and friendliness.

(Dickinson 1979, 28)

An English reader knows which class Mrs. Jones belongs to as soon as she utters her first words on the Chinese mountain scene, because of her accent, and would wonder what made someone with her background "rich". Her "tinny vowels" and "lack of aitches" reveal her background: as it turns out, she comes from a poor family in Battersea. As a young lady, she had met Monty, a rich young Jew, with whom she spent a number of years – and in the process her English had become a little more refined.

The English can, even from an early age, detect class and region, and whether someone goes, or did go, to a public or a state school, and such differences can be expressed in the English written language. As public schools hardly exist in Iceland, there is an undetectable class difference in the school system – and one could never tell which school

a person went to, unless he or she provided the information. Furthermore, there is hardly any distinction in language between upper and lower classes — the only slight variance in dialect depends on whether one comes from the north-east part of Iceland or not: a difference which has nothing to do with social status. This variance is actually so slight that it cannot be transcribed, only heard. Iceland actually prides itself in being a “classless” society, and as this fact is relevant when comparing the two nations — especially with regard to language — I consider it important to take the matter into account.

Terry Lacy notes the “classlessness” of the Icelandic society, and claims that “the fact of being an Icelander transcends all class differences. . . . The president of Iceland is respected as such, but every Icelander is his or her equal” (Lacy 1998, 4). Such lack of discrimination goes way back into Icelandic history. On his first visit to Iceland in the summer of 1871, William Morris was surprised to find that the two Icelandic guides employed to serve him and his fellow travellers paid their superiors “no sort of deference except that of good-fellowship.”¹² The Icelandic guides expected their travelling companions to do their share of the work, and assigned the famous English novelist to do the cooking. Being of the opinion that the use of servants was “immoral”, William Morris found the guides’ good-tempered attitude “delightful”. Nearly a century later, in 1964, the by then famous English poet, W.H. Auden remarks in his “Iceland Revisited” :

Fortunate island,
where all men are equal
But not vulgar - not yet.

(Auden 1976, 547)

Morris and Auden, coming from a highly stratified social background, are surprised to find that the Icelandic society appears virtually classless. Their observation of the Icelandic national character is confirmed by the EVSSG survey discussed earlier. Stefan Olafsson sums up the 1983-1984 outcome of Iceland and Britain in “Hvernig eru Íslendingar?” (“What are Icelanders like?” Olafsson 1985, 13):

¹² Letter 154, to Charles Eliot Norton, October 19, 1871, in *The Collected Letters of William Morris* Vol. I 1848-1880, ed. Norman Kelvin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 152.

	Freedom	Equality	Uncertain
Iceland	48%	47%	5%
Britain	69%	23%	8%

Of all the countries, Iceland scored by far highest as regards equality. Terry Lacy comments on this outcome:

Icelandic society is characterized by a strong emphasis on individualism, even rampant individualism, though the high valuation on freedom is paired with a belief in equality. . . Both values have a long history in Iceland, dating to the time of the settlement, when people had to be self-reliant but also had to stand together to make survival possible.

(Lacy 1998, 3)

Sigurdur Nordal, an Icelandic scholar writing on Icelandic culture in 1942, is of the same opinion, underscoring that the Icelanders have a very strong need for self-autonomy, equality and the freedom of the individual from dominance and restrictions. Nordal traces these qualities to the past, to the time of the chieftains in the middle ages, who found it difficult to retain control:

The chieftains could not take their subjects aboard like cods off a hook. They had to treat them like salmon on a line, now easy, now draw in, carefully, or slack the line so it would not break.

(Nordal 1942, 120)

Also looking towards historical explanations for the Icelanders' faith in equality, Stefan Olafsson holds that equality to the Icelanders in the times of the sagas did not mean that everyone was the same economically speaking. "Equality meant first and foremost that people have the same rights and that they should not suffer injustice" (Olafsson 1985, 10). From an international viewpoint, Olafsson claims, it is unique that the compensation for death, wounding, and all kinds of offences were legally the same for every free man in Iceland. In other Nordic and Germanic countries, however, the compensation depended on the status of the victim. Olafsson points out that the other Nordic countries scored way lower than Iceland in the survey, so Iceland's status is unique among them:

The Icelanders object to ranking people, object to showing respect to authority, reject all titles, demand to be equal to anybody else and be treated as such, everyone talks to everybody else and address each other only by first name, marry with no reference to status and they are very careful to keep a good reputation.

(My transl. Olafsson 1985, 11)

Other historical facts have contributed to the “classless” position in Iceland. For example, Peter Foote and David Wilson point out in *The Viking Achievement* that the feudal system was never fully accepted in Iceland (Foote and Wilson 1980). The feudal system led to increased class distinction in most other European countries. Therefore in England, the spiritual class distinction is obvious in human communication; you find a variance in dialect, dressing, attitudes and lifestyle between the classes (Olafsson 1985, 11).

Granted, as in any modern capitalist society, the distribution of money acts not on equal terms in Iceland: people are more or less fortunate; some are rich, some poor, and most of them — as in England — fall somewhere in between. Still, the boundaries between social classes seem to be less clear in Iceland than in England, and the children of the rich or powerful can, without encumbrance, socially interact with working-class children. They go to the same schools, for example, as private schools are only a very recent phenomenon in Iceland and do not seem to have managed to attract many pupils (in 1997 a total of 670 children attended private schools, and in 1998 the number dropped to 560).

Hence, in an Icelandic children’s book, for instance, a child’s educational background and his or her dialect tells the reader nothing about her location in the economic framework; the reader must wait for subtler hints. The writer of an English children book, on the other hand, can (and very often does) reveal a character’s background by simply transcribing his or her speech, with dropped *h*’s, double negatives and other speech “impairments” of the working-class, as illustrated above. Icelandic children’s books reflect the lack of class discrimination in the spoken language: in the 43 Icelandic children’s books chosen for this thesis, no character could tell another character’s class or background by their language – the moment of relevance comes when entering their homes.

In Thordur Helgason’s *Tilbuinn undir treverk*, for example, the protagonist, Jens, comes to Snorri’s home for the first time. Snorri has for a while been his classmate at school and

works with him in construction during the summer holiday. Snorri's mother comes to the door (dressed like she is "going to a ball"), and Jens enters his friend's room:

Snorri's room is larger than our living room. By one of the walls there is a huge leather sofa and above it a painting by Kjarval [Iceland's most famous artist]. There are two desks in his room and a computer on each. The window wall is covered in books and they are definitely not schoolbooks.

(My transl. Helgason 1998, 51)

Jens is very surprised to see all these signs of wealth and utters some exclamation. "Yes, this is how we live, the only children of the rich in Iceland," says Snorri, and I hear by the tone of his voice that he would not mind at all belonging to another group" (*ibid*, 51).

Nothing in Snorri's way of speaking had revealed his background – because of the homogeneity of the Icelandic language – and like almost all other young people with rich parents in Icelandic children's books, Snorri would wish to even out the discrimination and be "average".

The Icelandic impulse to even out discrimination is highlighted by Sigridur Duna Kristmundsdottir, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iceland.

Kristmundsdottir claims in a round-table discussion on nationality that what is typical of Icelandic culture is that it seeks to even out all discrimination as regards, for example, education, region and class.

And I think that we've done this on purpose as regards language, too, with the "pure-language crusade" which has been so passionately driven here [in Iceland]. We try to embrace Icelandic nationality and culture by striving to be as homogenous as possible.

(My transl. Arnason 1997)

The "pure-language crusade" will be discussed in Chapter 8 on history and heritage.

Icelandic language is, partly for these reasons, a virtually "classless" and "region-free" language. Some regions have, however, a very slight deviation in pronunciation: people from the northern part, for instance, pronounce their double consonants differently than people from the south do, but not enough to lead to a misunderstanding or debate: neither is generally considered "better" than the other. Nor could a writer illustrate these differences in, for example, a dialogue in a novel, because they could only be phonetically

described. Speaking of “proper” Icelandic in Iceland carries no discriminating class or regional associations, but it means using the right grammatical declinations, word order, and possessing a rich vocabulary. There is no “standard Icelandic” because no non-standard Icelandic exists. The less educated, or the more careless, if you wish, sometimes use the wrong grammatical declinations – what Icelanders refer to as “dative sickness” – but such digression does not necessarily refer to class.

It should by now be clear to the English reader how different the Icelandic’s approaches to language are from theirs. For a further illustration of this difference in approach, it is worthwhile to compare the aims of the Icelandic and English National Curricula. The Icelandic National Curriculum for 1999 states the purpose of teaching Icelandic:

The mother language, or Icelandic, is in itself a very complicated and elaborate subject. The national language, Icelandic, plays an important part in strengthening national unity, especially in the case of small nations like the Icelanders. The subject covers, among other matters, the cultural treasures that lie in the mother language and Icelandic literature. It also views the language as a social phenomenon considering it important to orient oneself to varieties in language, for example regional or generational, and emphasising the necessity for a certain tolerance in this regard. The mother language is a communication tool used for practical and artistic purposes, to express emotions or to induce them, to express opinions or seek them, to search for and deliver information. . . Extensive knowledge of the language, its nature, its history and its distinctive qualities is an important part of general education. Good knowledge of the language also enables one to apply it artistically and appreciate good and elaborate language.

(My transl. Menntamalaraduneytid 1999, 7)

What is notable is that Icelandic is constantly referred to as “the mother language” and “the national language” and associated with history and “national unity”. Striving for a knowledge of “good” and “elaborate” language is important. The insertion about “a certain tolerance” for regional or generational differences is fairly recent, and raises the question where the limit to this tolerance is set. The English National Curriculum 1999, on the other hand, does not specify English as a “mother” or “national” language. The purpose of teaching English is highlighted in “The Importance of English”:

English is a vital way of communicating in school, in public life and internationally. Literature in English is rich and influential, reflecting the experience of people from many countries and times.

In studying English pupils develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. It enables them to express themselves creatively and imaginatively and to communicate with others effectively. Pupils learn to become enthusiastic and critical readers of stories, poetry and drama as well as non-fiction and media texts.

The study of English helps pupils understand how language works by looking at its patterns, structures and origins. Using this knowledge pupils can choose and adapt what they say and write in different situations.

(DfEE and QCA 1999, 43)

Whereas the Icelandic National Curriculum presupposes that literature in Icelandic relates to the experiences of Icelandic forefathers, the English NC states that English literature reflects “the experience of people from many countries.” Whereas Icelandic students learn how to appreciate “good” language, English students learn how language works. As for the “tolerance” to regional differences in the Icelandic National Curriculum, its English counterpart has a section on Standard English with a “note” on non-standard English: “Pupils should be introduced to some of the main features of spoken standard English and be taught to use them” at Key stage (DfEE and QCA 1999, 45).

As this section has demonstrated, the language learned at the mother’s knee is a significant part of an individual’s national identity. With the aid of that language, people communicate with other members of the social network, and the vocabulary often depends on the history and landscape of their homeland. Language is, in some countries, encumbered with class and regional differences, and the disparity assigns an identity to the individual who internalises it. Samples from Icelandic and English children’s books show the difference between, on the one hand, a hierarchical society, and on the other, one, which claims itself “classless”. The nationally agreed approach to language, that is The National Curricula of England and Iceland, reflect the different attitude to language: one aims at a multicultural nation with a variety of dialects, and the other to a people who all speak the same “mother” language. While the Icelanders try to even out differences, the English perpetuate regional and class differences by transcribing speech in a manner which reflects them: it has become a tradition in English writing. “Traditions” and

customs are the main theme of the following section, which centres on the next item on Preston's list: the customs of society that the new member has to come to terms with.

4.8. Customs and Rituals

In *Englishness and National Culture* (1999), Anthony Easthope recalls that some time in the 1970s, he went to a Chile Solidarity meeting at which exiled Chileans wore national costume, danced national dances and sang national songs. Easthope ponders: "How, it made me wonder, if I was ever forced into political exile, would I perform my Englishness?" (Easthope 1999, 27). Because the English as a nation have no particular national costume, national dances, or national songs, Easthope would not know how to outwardly "perform" his nationality.

The act of "performing" national identity revolves about performing and partaking in a lot of other – and much less obvious – national customs and rituals than officially accredited national costumes, dances, and songs. Mark Harrison claims:

The experience of living in a particular place at a particular time is the product not only of personal histories and 'major events', but of repetitive, routinised, patterned social activity. Such activity is what, essentially, constitutes social 'order'.

(Harrison 1988, 195)

Being part of that social order constitutes national identity. Unconsciously, people take part in routinised activities that they would not normally consider a national celebration, but these activities are what the nation has in common. Some of them are practised on a daily basis, others weekly, or once a year, and added together, they represent "home" and identity.

Children yearn to belong to a community, to feel part of a group and goings-on. This yearning is well displayed in Aidan Chambers' *Dance on my Grave* (1982). Although young Hal dislikes being abducted by a motorcycle gang, he can comprehend their sense of belonging:

I feel it all and know it all as it is happening.
And know why these gangboys do it. Their way out. Their way in. Their can
of magic beans. Their togetherness. That they wouldn't dare speak or show
anyway else.

(Chambers 1982, 139)

Their “rites”, disagreeable though they might be, give the members of the gang some satisfaction, like tribal activities in the past. Routinised activities signify the safety of home to children: these are the things that they miss when their “normal” life has been upset or when away from home. For instance, Bridie, the young girl in Berlie Doherty's *Granny was a Buffer Girl* (1986), loves going to church with her family on Sundays. “The rich and quiet ceremony of the Mass was as familiar to her as family rituals; it was part of her life” (Doherty 1986, 25-6).

Icelandic children also have a craving for rituals as a safety measure, as Gudmundur Olafsson's *Emil og Skundi* (“Emil and Skundi” 1986) shows. When Emil was very young, his parents used to take him to a park near his home, but now his parents are always too busy to take him there. He goes alone:

Emil had now reached the Music Hall Park. He stepped of his bike and led it into the park. He headed for the “Rocky Mountain”. It was a special place in the park where huge rocks had been piled together. They had so often gone there when he was smaller, he, Mum and Dad, and played together. He had always called the pile “Rocky Mountain” and by and by the name had become part of the family's vocabulary.

(My transl., Olafsson 1986, 13)

Even rituals that are practiced on a smaller scale, within families, religious groups, etc., are part of the pattern which constitutes national identity, because they are customs that contribute toward a feeling of “home” in the world.

The ritual of eating certain foods is also a strong factor in the upholding of national identity. Probably the best known example of such occurrences come from Enid Blyton's Famous Five books, where the four children accentuated their Englishness by eating all kinds of infinitely English specialities, depicted by Blyton to the smallest detail. When I read Blyton's books as a child, in Icelandic translation, these particular foods, including

bacon, scones and tea, came to be associated in my mind with Englishness. Later I came to realize that the food most associated with the Englishness of all classes is “fish and chips”. The characters in English children’s books, particularly those of the lower classes, run to the chip shop for food, as the kids do, for example, in Sylvia Sherry’s *A Pair of Jesus*

Boots:

Being in sufficient funds, they dashed off to Chan’s for chips with plenty of salt and vinegar, and then sat on the Steps eating them, finishing up by licking the greasy papers,

(Sherry 1969, 25)

The children of John Rowe Townsend’s *Gumble’s Yard* are also familiar with this practice: “And Sandra slipped quietly out, as she’d done a thousand times before, to go to Wade’s fish-and-chip shop at the corner” (Townsend 1961, 126). Harry in Robert Westall’s *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1990) lives on a staple diet of fish and chips, and so does Cassy in Gillian Cross’ *Wolf* (1990). How necessary the ritual of eating fish and chips is for the English is revealed in an Icelandic children’s book, Andres Indridason’s *Manndomur* (“Manhood” 1990), which is set during WWII in British-occupied Iceland. Kalli, the protagonist, wants to know where a girl he is interested in works, so he asks his friend, Aslaug, and she replies:

– In Blue Heaven. It’s a take-out downtown, fish and chips [*in English*], you know. Have you ever tasted fish and chips?

No, I had never tasted fish and chips. But I knew that joints that sold these, and only these, had shot up all over the city like mushrooms on a mound since the arrival of the soldiers.

(My transl., Indridason 1990, 67)

The British soldiers brought a little piece of their country with them by insisting on being able to buy fish and chips in Reykjavik, so they could carry out their ritual of eating fish the way they had become accustomed to.

Particular foods can represent home, as for example in Rumer Godden’s *The Diddakoi* (1972). Kizzy, a young gipsy girl, has been brought up in her great-great-grandmother’s wagon. Miss Brooke invites her to her home:

Miss Brooke had made cheese toasts, they were in a hot dish; the homemade currant buns had a spicy fragrant smell; there was homemade raspberry jam and the tea was hot in the brown teapot.

(Godden 1972, 77)

The fact that the buns and the jam are “homemade” alludes both to a sense of “home” for the homeless little girl, and the English preference for things homemade. The English ritual of having tea and toast together brings the two of them closer together and suggests that Miss Brooke will later become Kizzy’s adoptive mother. Having tea has become a particularly English ceremony, although tealeaves originate from the southern hemisphere. The English have developed their own way of brewing and serving it, so that in countries outside England, tea becomes “outlandish” in the eyes of the English, as indicated in Bernard Ashley’s *A Kind of Wild Justice*, when a group of English people go to Paris and “the old people were settled in their rooms with pots of foreign lemon tea” (Ashley 1978, 160).

Nationality can be “performed” in a myriad of ways. As such, national identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed. Partaking in the celebration of national holidays and cheering for the national league at football matches are probably the occasions when people are most aware of the construction. Although England has no particular national holiday, there are days when English nationality is celebrated, for example on the last night of the Proms, on the Queen’s Birthday, and Guy Fawkes night, which is something of a national celebration for the English, a national bonfire party, the celebration of which seems odd to a foreigner. Kizzy, the young Gypsy girl in Rumer Godden’s *The Diddakoi*, is a kind of a foreigner to Englishness and English culture, and does not relate to Guy Fawkes Day: “They burn the guy. I don’t like that” (Godden 1972, 120). Clem, who is all-English, comments: “Besides, it’s tit for tat. Guy Fawkes, he tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament” (Godden, 1972, 120). Guy Fawkes posed a threat to England and therefore he must be symbolically burnt each year, and every English person knows that. In Robert Westall’s *The Kingdom by the Sea*, for example, the 12-year-old

character comments when the city is being bombed that “it all smelt like Guy Fawkes night” (Westall 1990, 37).

The Icelanders have a national holiday, which is to commemorate the founding of the Republic of Iceland, and is held on the Birthday of Iceland’s national hero, Jon Sigurdsson, June 17th. Old and young take part in the celebrations, but the young seem to be losing touch with the origins of the celebration, as 16-year-old Jens in Thordur Helgason’s *Tilbuinn undir treverk* (“Ready for Woodwork” 1998) shows:

I go over to Aegir’s place and we decide to go downtown. But June 17th is not for us. It’s for kids who carry balloons and eat ice cream like monsters. They’re all gone home. The ones left are young people in love who hold hands and stare into each other’s eyes, and boozers who wander about, and one of them asks me if I remember why we celebrate June 17th: he just can’t remember. I’m at a loss but Aegir insists that June 17th is a national holiday because it was the day the beer drinking ban was lifted in Iceland.

“Of course,” says the boozier, “it had to be.”

...

We both go home. On the way we try to remember what happened which was so remarkable on June 17th. To me, nothing is more remarkable that I had seen Gerdur [a girl he’s in love with] with Omar.

“I bet it had something to do with that Jon Sigurdsson,” Aegir mutters thoughtfully when we depart.

(My transl., Helgason 1998, 66-67)

True, no character in an Icelandic children’s book from before the 1980s would wonder why June 17th is celebrated. Although a new generation of Icelanders has been distanced from the nation’s fight for freedom, they partake in national celebrations and other rituals that have to do with the construction and reconstruction of national identity, such as watching national football matches and the Eurovision Song Contest on the television, cheering for their national representatives.

Customs and rituals, like going to church on Sundays, to the “corner chippie” on a weeknight, or to visit the same spot in the park with the family, irrelevant though they may seem, can become an important part of a child’s life. According to Patrick Wright, coming to terms with customs is one of the steps a new member of a society has to take in order to make his or her way in the social world. Other steps involve appropriating and

internalising values and norms, understanding institutions and coping with language.

Samples from English and Icelandic children's books portray the relevance of these steps in the growth of a new individual. Differences between the samples confirm that there are national variations – and the variations correspond to the outcome of a survey on national values. It is clear that children's books have a part in transmitting national values to the young, both to introduce the values, reconfirm them – and re-evaluate them by making fun of them. The values portrayed in children's books must not always be taken for what they seem to be; they need to be posed against external realities: the current political situation and the problems that the society in question is facing at the time. A cultural materialist viewpoint is therefore imperative, posing children's literature and historical events side by side, reviewing the effects of history in the making on the reading material of the nation's young members.

The next chapter goes further into the effects of historical events on children's literature, and examines how the nation's past history reflects itself in the “national character” and how that character emerges in English and Icelandic children's books.

CHAPTER 5

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND NATIONAL CHARACTER

We rarely question the existence of nations or the idea that nations share something which we can call their identity. We may disagree as to which are the most important factors which go to make up nationhood: geographic unity, common language and/or cultural background, but we do not doubt that there is some such thing as a nation.

(Sigurdsson 1996, 41)

. . . a man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears.

(Gellner 1983, 6)

Were there no national barriers, no borders between nations, no seas, no differences in language or culture, there would be no ground for a comparison between nations and cultures – there would be no “other”. But, as Gisli Sigurdsson points out, we cannot deny the fact that there *are* nations and they *do* differ. This study draws on the historical and geographical differences between two nations in order to deduce how these differences affect the “national character” and the formation and preservation of national identity, using “evidence” from English and Icelandic children’s books, as well as confirming that national identity is embedded in writing for children. My intention is to highlight certain characteristics that make Icelandic or English children’s literature distinct – and link those attributes to certain agreed-on qualities in “the national character”.

The preceding paragraph is loaded with problematic terms, which automatically raise numerous questions. What is the difference between the terms “nation” and “culture”? What is “national identity” and what does one mean by “national character”? Precise definitions of these terms are necessary in order to clearly discuss the reflection of these terms in children’s books. This chapter clarifies these terms, linking them with English and Icelandic particularities – the question of “Englishness” and “being Icelandic” – using examples from the children’s literature of both nations to portray how icons of national character, culture and identity are infiltrated in the text.

5.1. Nation, Culture and National Identity

National identity is always a shifting, unsettled complex of historical struggles and experiences that are cross-fertilized, produced, and translated through a variety of cultures.

(Giroux 1995, 53)

As Henry A. Giroux points out, national identity is not once permanently fixed to stay the same forever. New events in history, new findings, and merely the flux of time can affect national identity, or the way people feel about themselves in relation to the nation they belong to. A nation, according to Kristjan Arnason, is a number of people who elect to form a group. “A nation is therefore a kind of enlarged association or a football club which can go to war, if attacked . . . and the club needs to have a flag, some representative sign for the union” (my transl. Arnason 1999, 450). Hugh Seton-Watson uses similar words to describe national culture, claiming it is “a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness” (Seton-Watson 1977, 1). Nation, state and culture often seem to become amalgamated, possibly causing confusion. Anthony Easthope points out that “Nation as state and nation as culture cannot be fused into an authentic unity” (Easthope 1999, 55). Easthope illustrates that in the case of England, one can allow “both state and culture – and their mixed components – to be marked as ‘English,’” going on to say:

On the side of the state, the nation as “English” is produced and sustained by a series of institutions and practices, including the Royal Navy, Parliament, Whitehall, the Inland Revenue, the Old Bailey, Lloyds of London, the Bank of England, ICI, Manchester Metropolitan University, Eton College, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the British Council, and so on, all of which can be defined as in some way characteristically English. At the same time, on the culture side of the division, a notion of Englishness can seem to preside over “the English language” and English “way of talking”, a canon of literature established as English, English landscape, a certain sense of humour felt to be English, English common sense, and so on and so on.

(Easthope 1999, 55-56)

The same can be claimed for Iceland, that both state and culture are “Icelandic”. On the institutional, or state side, there is Parliament, the Presidency, the National Treasury (“Sedlabankinn”), the state television and radio services (“RUV”), the Arnarnagney Institute (where the saga manuscripts are stored), etc. Cultural components are the same as

in England: language, literature, landscape, and certain “Icelandic” traits. Therefore, the concepts of “nation”, “state” and “national culture”, can be understood, in this thesis, to mean the same in relation to the two countries, England and Iceland.

National identity means roughly to conceive of oneself as a member of the nation. There is no tangible object to “prove” that communion – except for a passport – as it is actually an “imagined” concept. Social historian Benedict Anderson, the author of *Imagined Communities*, calls the nation an “imagined” political community for the following reasons:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

(Anderson 1983, 15)

Anderson takes as an example an American, who will never meet, or know, more than a handful of his 240 million fellow Americans, but still has absolute confidence in their conjoining activity. Anthony Easthope draws on another metaphor when describing the bonding of a nation. He compares national identity to driving a car: people know the rules and follow them unconsciously. Although an individual is in total control of driving his or her own car, he or she needs to depend on other drivers to follow the rules: read the signs, stop at a red light, keep to the right (or left) side of the road, etc. Easthope says about this imagined driving: “To do it at all I have to believe I’m driving the car but it is as true to say that the car and the roadway system drive me” (Easthope 1999, 4). The car driver’s self depends on another identity in which he or she is situated and positioned in ways he or she is not aware of. Hence, Easthope wants to regard national identity as an unconscious structure, rather than a conscious set of images.

To continue with Easthope’s metaphor, my objective here is to identify the road signs, the “stop” signs, the green lights, the right or left turns, as they appear (in disguise) in English and Icelandic children’s books. This study examines on the one hand a very complicated road system, providing ambiguous symbols, as the English nation is a part of a larger

body: Britain. On the other hand, there is the Icelandic nation, where all the symbols are clear and practically everyone follows the same road signals.

When this thesis was originally designed, I had planned to write about how national *and* cultural identity was reflected in English and Icelandic children's books. As the research progressed, it became clear that I would have to concentrate on national identity alone – because cultural and national identity is basically one and the same in almost homogenous Iceland. The matter is much more complicated in England: the English nation is an assembly of people with different cultural backgrounds. Whether such a mixture can maintain a notion of “togetherness” may to some seem an inconceivable idea. Yet, as Anthony D. Smith points out, the notion is not wholly incredible:

Where once each ethnic community was a world onto itself, the centre of the universe, the light amid darkness, now the heritage and culture values from the storehouse of that same community, selected, reinterpreted and reconstituted, form one unique, incommensurable national identity among many other, equally unique, cultural identities.

(Smith 1991, 84)

Smith goes on to say that although these cultural identities and other kinds of identities may differ, national identity overrides them:

Of all the collective identities in which human beings share today, national identity is perhaps the most fundamental and inclusive. . . . Other types of collective identity – class, gender, race, religion – may overlap or combine with national identity but they rarely succeed in undermining its hold, though they may influence its direction.

(Smith 1991, 143)

For instance, cultural diversity has without a doubt influenced English society, and yet we cannot say that there is no such thing as the English nation or deny that the English nation has its particularities that set it apart from other nations. Anthony D. Smith explains that there is “a straightforward understanding of the concept of ‘identity’ as ‘sameness’. The members of a particular group are alike in just those respects in which they differ from non-members outside the group” (Smith 1991, 75). Hence, although a number English people may originally have come from the Caribbean or India, and although they do not all belong to the Anglican Church, they are English, define themselves as English, and

thus differ from a German, an American, or an Icelandic. For that reason, I concluded that leaving out cultural identity and concentrating on national identity would be appropriate.

As Henry A. Giroux pointed out in the beginning of this section, national identity is constantly being reconstructed:

The concept of identity has two main connotations. From one point of view, it has to do with the feeling that something is and remains the same; the feeling of continuity. On the other hand, having an identity also means being different from others. The double meaning of the concept implies that identity should only be understood in a dynamic context. The reinforcement of group identity is combined with the continuous marking of symbolic boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.
(Mathisen 1993, 37)

The symbolic boundaries include both tangible objects (flags, national costumes) and intangible ideas. The frequency of sightings on the tangible objects side is measurable to a degree, but the intangible “feeling” an individual has for his or her nation is hard to measure. What Mathisen refers to as the “reinforcement of group identity” and the “continuous marking” of symbolic boundaries takes place either very openly – where flags are waved and folk dancing takes place – or in some place like home or at school, where nobody is aware of the reinforcement. Anthony D. Smith comments:

These symbols and ceremonies are so much part of the world we live in that we take them, for the most part, for granted. They include the obvious attributes of nations – flags, anthems, parades, coinage, capital cities, oaths, folk costumes, museums of folklore, war memorials, ceremonies of remembrance for the national dead, passports, frontiers – as well as more hidden aspects, such as national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, fairy tales, forms of etiquette, styles of architecture, arts and crafts, modes of town planning, legal procedures, educational practices and military codes – all those distinctive customs, mores, styles and ways of acting and feeling that are shared by the members of a community of historical culture.
(Smith 1991, 77)

The “sharing” of all these aspects of a national culture and institutions is a means of contributing to national identity.

5.2. The “National Character”

The mythology of a nation is the intelligible mask of that enigma called “the national character.” Through myths the psychology and world view of our cultural ancestors are transmitted to modern descendents, in such a way and with such

power that our perception of contemporary reality and our ability to function in the world are directly, often tragically affected.

(Slotkin 1978, 3)

Richard Slotkin posits that this enigma, “the national character”, is preserved and constantly restored through the passing of myth from generation to generation. My argument is that children’s books have an important function in this process: passing national myths and thereby taking part in shaping the “national character”. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the essence of “national character” and consider some differing opinions on this phenomenon.

In *Culture and Society*, originally published in 1958, Raymond Williams quotes Edmund Burke’s idea on the “organic society”. Burke says:

A nation is not an idea only of local extent, and individual momentary aggregation; but it is an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space. And this is a choice not of one day, or of one set of people, not a tumultuary and giddy choice; it is a deliberate election of the ages and of generations; it is a constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice, it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time.

(Burke 1856, 147; as quoted in Williams 1990, 11)

To this, Williams adds: “Immediately after Burke, this complex which he describes was to be called the ‘spirit of the nation’; by the end of the nineteenth century, it was to be called a national ‘culture’” (Williams 1990, 11). From Burke’s notion the national spirit, or the national character, could be conceived as one entity encompassing the spirit of the nation: almost a living, breathing concept that has its tempers, its morals – and an ancestry.

Having a national identity, then, is conceiving oneself, or (referring back to Benedict Anderson’s suggestion) *imagining* oneself as a part of this enormous, yet invisible, wave, or organism. To a large part of the civilized world, including England, such an idea seems outdated; it belongs to the 18th or 19th century, to philosophers and romantics like Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), who introduced the idea of *Volksgeist* (“national character”) as expressed in the language and literature of a nation. Anthony D. Smith quotes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who claimed: “The first rule which we have to follow is

that of national character: every people has, or must have, a character; if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one” (Rousseau 1915, 319; Smith 1991, 75).

The fact that the Icelandic nation still clings onto some notions which normally are associated with Romanticism, including Rousseau’s ideas, has struck me repeatedly while reading the Icelandic children’s books covered here, as well as other Icelandic literature, fiction and non-fiction. The idea of a “national character” is certainly still alive in Iceland today. The Icelanders have a term, “thjodarsal” – literally meaning “the soul of the nation” or “the national spirit” – which encompasses a cross-section of the feelings and aspirations of the nation. On May 11th, 2001, my search for the term “thjodarsal” on the principal Icelandic search engine, www.leit.is, for “thjodarsal” spawned a total of forty-nine exact matches, which serve to prove how commonly used the term is in Iceland. According to the University of Iceland’s on-line dictionary, the first known use of the term was in the letters of Valtyr Gudmundsson to his mother in the 1920s (Ordabok Haskolans 2001). The use of the term has grown in the past decade, especially after its public promotion as the title of a popular radio program in the late 1980s. The term is used in all kinds of associations, as my Internet search shows: A flea market claims to have a place in the *thjodarsal* (Kristinsson 2001); the National Theatre holds that David Stefansson’s play, *The Golden Gate*, occupies one of the tenderest places of the *thjodarsal* (Olafsdottir 2001); an artist claims that Gryla, a legendary troll originating in the sagas, the character of many a children’s book, is “one of the strongest folk elements which still live in the Icelandic *thjodarsal*” (Kristmundsson 2000); and Gunnar Dal’s literary works “have for years enchanted the Icelandic *thjodarsal*” (Smith 2001). The national spirit is not limited to Iceland: an Icelandic travel agency offers a trip to Morocco, “where Arabic culture is interwoven with the African *thjodarsal*” (Student Travel 1999); Henrik Ibsen’s collected fairy tales supposedly carry “a significant message about the Norwegian *thjodarsal*” (Mathisen 1999); the stories about Scottish folk hero William Wallace reveal his influence on the Scottish *thjodarsal* (Gunnarsson 1995); and a speaker at a conference claims he

wants to analyse which aspects of the American *thjodarsal* led to its original rejection of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (Gunnarsson 2001).

The use of the term *thjodarsal* in Iceland seems not to carry any undesirable connotations – not even in academia. The rector of the University of Iceland mentions it, without any reservations, in his Sovereign Day Address in 1997:

The President of Iceland, First Lady, the President of the Student Committee, Members of Parliament, and other good Icelanders.¹³ Today is the 1st of December, the day we Icelanders celebrate our sovereignty. What does it mean to have a Day of Sovereignty? What is involved in being a sovereign nation? It means that there is one national identity, one national will and one national spirit [*thjodarsal*]. The sovereignty of Iceland is upheld by these three elements: The identity of the nation as an individual unit in the community of nations, its will to develop itself as such, and its perception that we all share the same ideals and dreams about life and the future.

(My translation, Skulason 1997)

The Rector uses the term again in his speech at the University of Iceland's Graduation Ceremony on October 21st, 2000, saying that education in effect “is part of the force that creates communities of people and emerges in what we call national identity and national spirit [*thjodarsal*]” (Skulason 2000).

Intending to connect the idea of “*thjodarsal*” with children's literature, I looked to Professor Maria Nikolajeva's writings. Nikolajeva is an expert in research into children's literature; she is of Russian-German origin, working in Sweden. As discussed earlier, Nikolajeva formulates the following question in her Introduction to *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*: “Is there such a thing as national children's literature that reflects national mentality, specific social history, views on education, and so on?” (Nikolajeva 1995, xi). Again, in *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic*, Nikolajeva writes: “Readers recognize texts as their ‘own’ through language, national mentality, ‘credible’ descriptions, and so on” (Nikolajeva 1996, 21). The usage and definitions given in a thesaurus provide useful keys into exploring and understanding

what Nikolajeva means by “national mentality”. For *mentality*, the thesaurus provides, amongst other words: “way of thinking”, “state of mind”, “attitude” and “outlook”. These are generally the factors that determine character, and therefore it is safe to take the two words, national character and national mentality, as well as the Icelandic term *thjodarsal*, to mean practically the same: a common identity which encompasses the memories and feelings of a nation.

Maria Nikolajeva is unafraid of using terms associated with nationality, because as an individual and academic, she is situated between national cultures. English scholars and the English in general seem more cautious of using such words. On the same day as I searched for “thjodarsal” on the Icelandic search engine, my Internet search for the English term “national character” and “national spirit” on the search engines of www.yahoo.co.uk and www.lycos.co.uk generated no fully matched results. The same search on altavista.co.uk produced five “national character sets” (typesetting choices), a course at a University (“Introduction To American Studies I: National Character & Culture”), and no more exact matches. I would suggest that the reason why Icelandic scholars feel uninhibited in the use of such terms, and why the English hesitate to use them, lies in each of the nation’s histories. The next two sections survey how English history has affected English national identity supporting the argument with texts from English children’s books. The section following (5.4.) does the same with Icelandic history and Icelandic national identity.

5.3. “Englishness” and the English National Character

A person’s past always seems to catch up with his or her present, affecting their decisions and way of thinking. Likewise, a nation’s past has tremendous influence on its present “character”. And just like a person with a shadowy past, some nations resist facing the trespasses of yesteryear. Anthony Easthope suggests in *Englishness and National Culture*

¹³ It is worth mentioning that the speech is given in Icelandic, and, as a rule, when speaking in Icelandic, a Footnote continued on next page.

(1999) that many nations carry something on their back they cannot see, like Germany (Nazism), Russia (Stalin), France (Vichy), and the U.S.A. (Vietnam). Easthope continues to say that England has a baggage to carry that it cannot face: “England still can neither face nor forget the Empire and loss of Empire” (Easthope 1999, 31). The effects of England’s past as an imperial nation are both negative and positive; on the “negative” side, there is an identity crisis: England has to come to terms with the displacement from being a fractured empire and build a new identity. The “positive” aspect of history bolsters the nation’s ego: as an empire, England “anglicised” a large part of the world, leaving traces of “Englishness” as far as in India and Australia, filling the English with a sense of superiority and glory. Anthony Easthope states that “the English continue to repeat Empire through irony – an irony which recognises its inevitability and at the same time mourns the loss” (Easthope 1999, 31). Such irony, and the pull between “shame” and “pride” over the past, is recognizable in several contemporary English children’s books. In this section and the next, some studies on national identity, “Englishness” and the English national character are reviewed, while traces of imperialism are left for a discussion on heritage in Chapter 8.

The rector of the University of Iceland declared in his speech above that the Icelanders have “one national identity, one national will and one national spirit” (Skulason 1997). The English people can not allow themselves to declare with pride and honour to be a unified, whole nation because they have crushed other people’s national identities, suppressed their will and humbled their spirit. The English are a bit “embarrassed” because of the country’s history of suppressing other nations. As an imperial nation, the English used to have a firm base to stand on: an “old” history of conquest and a valuable “old” heritage. Having let go of many of its precious assets, the nation has come into an identity crisis, affecting both the “national character” and individuals. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton point out the complications of being English:

presenter assumes that the listeners that can understand him or her, *are* Icelandic.

Englishness is not simply about something called ‘the national character’ but has to be seen as a nexus of values, beliefs and attitudes which are offered as unique to England and to those who identify as, or wish to identify as, English. In other words, Englishness is a state of mind: a belief in a national identity which is part and parcel of one’s sense of self.

(Giles and Middleton 1995, 5)

In simpler terms, Giles and Middleton are saying that people choose whether to accept the “package” of Englishness or not, that it is a conscious personal choice. I would argue that children unconsciously internalise national values, as discussed in the last chapter. The identity crisis starts when they, as young adults, begin questioning those values: when the world outside and domestic pressures move in on them. Douglas Kellner states that “only in a society anxious about identity could the problems of personal identity, or self-identity, or identity crises, arise and be subject to worry and debate” (Kellner 1995, 232). The national identity crisis is the issue here, taking place on two levels: the level of England’s identity within Britain and the level of England’s global identity.

The former level regards England’s identity problem within Britain. The subject of “Englishness” versus “being British” was scrutinized in a programme to accompany a production of *Henry V*, staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2000. The producers sent out a questionnaire to people of different ages throughout Britain. In his Introduction to the program, Neal Ascherson writes: “The suggestion that the British were not sure who they were would have seemed absurd even fifteen years ago” (as quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company 2000, no pag.). At the turn of the century, however, the British are going through an “identity muddle”, as Ascherson calls it. Here are some of the replies to the questionnaire:

“I always define myself as Northern Irish, and I’m proud of it. What does being British mean to me? Mainly having a British passport rather than an Irish one.”
(Female, 26 years old)

“I am very proud to be Scottish, although I consider myself a European as well. Being ‘British’ to me means my passport, and being disappointed at the Olympics.” (Male, 27)

“I’m English (not British), and proud of it.” (Male, 70)

“I’m English, and I do take pride in it. I don’t think of myself as European. I’d say I come from London; I’d fly the British flag, fight for England, and support English teams. . . . I only think about nationality during football tournaments, and I don’t think there’s any difference between that and nationalism. . . . In the future, people will be calling themselves English, Welsh, etc.” (Female, 17 years old)
(Royal Shakespeare Company 2000, no pag.)

The commentators generally do not declare themselves proud of being British, but they openly admit they are proud of being English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish.

National pride, as well as other discriminating values, was measured in the EVSSG (The European Value Systems Study Group) study referred to earlier. Stefan Olafsson shows the outcome, from which I have removed some countries irrelevant to my discussion. The question: “How proud are you of your country?” revealed that the United States of America scored highest and Western Germany lowest:

	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
U.S.A.	80%	16%	2%	1%
Iceland	57%	32%	7%	2%
Britain	55%	31%	8%	3%
W-Germany	21%	38%	18%	11%

(Olafsson 1985, 117)

The past history of Western Germany and Nazism obviously has its consequences, as 11% of the subjects are not at all proud of their country. The abundance of conscious patriotism in the U.S.A. – flags everywhere, singing the national anthem in schools, etc. – has resulted in great national devotion. Iceland and Britain are near the “middle”: Iceland with a total of 89% of “quite” and “very” proud, and Britain with 86%. It must be taken into consideration that this was in the early 1980s, in the era of Thatcherism and the Falklands war, when the British national spirit was soaring (as will be discussed later in this chapter, wars tend to have this effect). The high rating could also derive from the fact that although the English, Welsh, Northern Irish and the Scots may lack a “British” bonding, they take pride in their nation – and this is the pride they refer to in the survey. The English are, still, a lot more hesitant saying openly that they are proud of being English than a Scot

would be about saying he or she is proud of being Scottish. Jack Straw, MP, Home Secretary highlight this fact, in July 2000, as quoted in the *Henry V* program:

There is a particular problem with some people's view of Englishness . . . There is a distorted, incomplete idea of what it is to be patriotic for those in England, which is different from that in Wales or Scotland or Ireland. The sense of nationality that these smaller nations within the United Kingdom have is partly defined by the fact that they are smaller. They have had to express their culture in order not to be overwhelmed by England. We have not had that. We have also had all the global baggage of the empire and a lot of jingoism here.

(as quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company 2000, no pag.)

This devaluing of Englishness, may then, have its roots in the fact that the English are stuck with "all the global baggage of the empire." Hence, the English people feel slightly uncomfortable about declaring their love for England.

A part of the cultural tension which still lingers between England and the Welsh and Scots, can be traced back to the writings of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). Philip Dodd assigns the exclusion of the Celts to Arnold, who, according to Michael Hechter, offered "the core/periphery relationship as the appropriate one between the 'metropolitan' English culture and the 'provincial' cultures of the other nations (Dodd 1986, 12; Hechter 1975). As stated by Arnold, "Wales, where the past still lives, where every place has its tradition, every name its poetry and where the people, the genuine people, still knows this past, this tradition, this poetry, and lives with it, and clings to it" (Arnold 1965, 291).

Cheshire-bred Alan Garner's provides an insight into the tension between English and Welsh national culture in *The Owl Service* (1967). On the one hand, Garner does not hesitate to criticize his fellow natives in this novel, set in Wales, where he poses the half-proud and half-scared English boy, Roger, against the self-assuranced Welsh boy called Gwyn. Roger seems envious of the close bond between the Welsh people and their confident identity and togetherness. "'You Welsh are all the same,' said Roger. 'Scratch one and they all bleed'" (Garner 1967, 34). Roger goes to a Welsh shop with Gwyn and is offended when the shopkeeper talks to other customers in Welsh:

'You know, it's darned rude of them, speaking Welsh like that,' said Roger.
'How would they have liked it if we'd started up in French?'
'Very thoughtless, yes: seeing as they're Welsh round here' [Gwyn replies]
(Garner 1967, 43)

The position of superiority mixed with fear of the "uncivilized" again produces an exclamation from Roger later in the story. Roger's father, Clive, cannot believe that the Welsh Huw Halfbacon will not give him the keys he asks for:

'No one,' said Clive, 'no one can be that dense! It's a conspiracy!'
'They're mad, every one of them,' said Roger. 'The way they smile and nod their heads, and they could be saying anything. You never know where you are with them.'

(Garner 1967, 107)

Although Alan Garner is writing from a self-conscious point of view as a member of the nation which conquered and controlled the Welsh, he is also writing from the point of view of the English empire, which finds other cultures "interesting" for their quaint and "different" heritage. The Welsh, as Matthew Arnold stated, "cling" to the past and tradition. Like several English children's authors, Alan Garner is pulled between "shame" on behalf of England not respecting Welsh culture, and "pride" as a member of the "metropolitan" culture surveying the "provincial" culture. Garner has sought out a tale from the Welsh Mabinogion for the central plot, around which he orders the English and Welsh players. As Philip Dodd points out, "The Celts are licensed their unique contribution to and place in the national culture: the cost is that they know their peripheral place as the subject of the metropolitan centre" (Dodd 1986). Compared to highbrow English literature, the Mabinogion is primitive, it belongs to the past, to the time before science. The Celts cling to supernatural notions, which the English have discarded. C.W. Sullivan III points out in an article about the Mabinogion and its influence on children's fantasy that "the obvious Celtic and Scandinavian influences on popular literature makes it even less likely that they would be considered worthy of study as influences of 'serious literature'" (Sullivan III 1988, 102).

England's central position within the Commonwealth has thus led to peripheral positioning of the other nations: the Welsh, the Northern Irish and the Scots. This centring of the "oppressor" has led to a devaluing of Englishness because English pride is unavoidably mixed with self-reproach. Other predominant factors that have led to the depreciation of Englishness are the term's association with a certain region in England, a specific class, and a disappearing landscape. These associations were, according to Richard Shannon, made in the last part of the 19th century and have remained fixed to the term. Shannon says: "The characteristic 'Englishness' of English culture was made then very much what it is now. The quip that all the oldest English traditions were invented in the last quarter of the nineteenth century has great point" (Shannon 1976, 12-13). Philip Dodd agrees with Shannon, but claims that the term "invented" does not "adequately register the complex and overlapping processes of invention, transformation and recovery which characterised the remaking of English identity and the national culture in the later years of the nineteenth century" (Dodd 1986, 1). As Dodd points out, it was no "common intention" to exclude social groups, for example the working class, women and the Irish, from the remaking of class, gender and national identity, because it "was undertaken by such a variety of social locations and by such various groups that it is difficult to talk of a common intention" (Dodd 1986, 2). Dodd recognizes the heavy influence of dominant nineteenth-century thinkers and writers like Matthew Arnold and his successors, who equated Englishness with certain institutions, such as the ancient universities, where the upper classes were educated, adding that

all geographical locations in England are equal but some are more equal than others. For instance, the 'essential' England may have been represented as 'rural,' but it is noteworthy how many of the figures who represented it as such derived their authority from metropolitan centres such as Oxford.

(Dodd 1986, 4)

Dodd adds that the old schools did not only select in terms of class, but also in terms of gender. He emphasizes their construct of masculinity and their exclusion of women (Dodd 1986, 5). A prime example of this kind of "Englishness" is to be found in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995): the story of Lyra Belaqua, who is brought up in the all-male

Jordan College of Oxford. Lyra despises female scholars and thinks that no institution in the world (or in other worlds) can aspire to the greatness of Jordan College.

War has had a great effect on the English character. The courage to face adversity, oppose evil, fight a war and defend England against all kinds of threats is a recurrent theme in English children's books. As war is never displayed as a probable threat in Icelandic children's books, I consider it pertinent to review how, and to what purposes, war and foreign threats are depicted in English children's books.

5.4. War and Foreign Threats in English Children's Books

As I reached the final stages of this thesis, a terrorist attack shook the American nation, on September 11th, 2001. The reaction of the U.S. was twofold: the nation clung together issuing patriotic statements, and the people demanded revenge – immediate war against the terrorists. Such drastic reaction made me conscious of the effect of my nation's history on my "way of thinking": war was the last thing to come to my mind. I recognized that war experiences may be reflected differently in children's literature, according to the depth of the scars they have left on a nation, and the amount of pride or shame associated with them. Before launching into a discussion on war as an issue in children's books, I must briefly consider the difference in the histories of Iceland and England and the presence (or absence) of war.

Although Icelandic sagas abound with stories about Vikings splitting each other in two with axes and swords, and about men seeking compulsory revenge for the murder of a brother or a close relative, the nation has never hosted an army — its people have never borne arms against another nation. The first settlers of the country were Norwegian adventurers, who arrived in 874 AD, and gave it the name "Iceland". For the first four centuries, Iceland was an independent state, with its own parliament, established in 930. In 1262, however, the Icelanders signed a treaty with the King of Norway, in which they

accepted him as King, but the country would retain its freedom. Norway later became united with Denmark, and Iceland was included in that deal. Representatives of the Danish government came to Iceland in 1662 with a league of armed soldiers and forced Icelandic officials to sign a declaration of loyalty to the King of Denmark, who thus assumed absolute power over the country. No blood was shed at that occasion, only tears by Icelandic leaders, who felt they had deceived their fellow countrymen. For the next two centuries, the Danes used their dictatorial power to the utmost, which included, for instance, trade monopoly and thereby driving the Icelanders to desperate poverty. The Icelanders finally glimpsed a hope in 1848, when the Danish King renounced his dictatorial power, but the situation remained the same. Nineteenth-century Romantics, under the leadership of Jon Sigurdsson, found this intolerable, and wrote letters back and forth to the Danish government, fighting with words to reclaim the nation's independence. The Danish finally granted Iceland a limited Constitution in their internal affairs in 1874, and a few years later, complete home rule. The last ties were cut when finally the Republic of Iceland was founded on Jon Sigurdsson birthday, 17 June, in 1944.

Meanwhile, the two World Wars, which left other parts of Europe devastated, did not affect the island in the North as drastically. Iceland lost a number of seamen and seafarers to foreign bombers, but the country itself was not attacked. In 1940, as the battle between foreign powers reached a peak, it became apparent that the country could be an asset for whoever wanted to claim it. On a bright May morning in 1940, the residents of Reykjavik heard the drone of airplanes which did not drop bombs, but printed flyers, telling the citizens that the country was now peacefully occupied by Britain, and that the British had come as guests, to help the Icelanders defend themselves. A few hours later some British battleships quietly sailed into Reykjavik harbour, and British soldiers stepped ashore, to

claim the Post Office, telegraph office, and radio headquarters. That same night, Iceland's Prime Minister addressed the nation, encouraging the people to treat the British as friendly visitors, who would only remain there as long as needed for their protection. The Icelanders resignedly accepted the seizure, relieved that someone had managed to outstrip the Germans to the anticipated invasion.

The only war Iceland has fought, then, is its battle for independence, and the final victory was achieved without blood-letting; not a single man or woman was killed. The sole weapons used in this warfare were sharp tongues and well-poised pens — which are appropriate for a nation priding itself in its oral legends and a rich, literary heritage — teamed with a strong ambition for independence.

England, on the other hand, has had to make bigger and bloodier sacrifices, both in order to defend itself and to expand its boundaries. Internal conflicts have also taken their toll, e.g. the War of the Roses and the Scottish wars in the 17th century. Fighting other nations has brought the different parts of Great Britain closer together. As a matter of fact, Linda Colley claims that Great Britain could be regarded as an invented nation through war:

It was an invention forged above all by war. Time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it. They defined themselves as Protestants struggling for survival against the world's foremost Catholic power.

(Colley 1992, 5)

Brian Graham adds to Colley's declaration that "National identity is thus created in particular social, historical and political contexts" (Graham 1998B, 40). There is no doubt that the history of war has affected the English "national character". To begin with, as Judy Giles and Tim Middleton point out, wars tend to fortify national identity: "Wars are obvious occasions when ideas about national identity become particularly visible" (Giles and Middleton 1995, 110). Cecil L. Eubanks brings attention to some of the "qualities" of war:

War offers much, as it takes much. It offers the chance to perform acts of superhuman courage and kindness. It offers the opportunity for community through dependency on others. Exposure to battle offers, to some, the opportunity to confront themselves, their values, their guilt.

(Eubanks 1988, 139)

Because war has these effects, the memory of war can be resurrected in order to summon up a stronger national identity at times when it seems to be flagging.

The memory of the Second World War has indeed had a tremendous influence on the English nation. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton claim: “In fact the versions of Englishness occasioned by the Second World War have remained potent tools in more recent accounts of the ‘English character’ in *extremis*” (Giles and Middleton 1995, 9). Discussing the different kinds of patriotism lying behind WWI and WWII, saying that in the former, you died for England, and in the latter, you died standing up to the big bully, Giles and Middleton point to a Ministry of Information film, “in which German bombing is depicted as being unable to kill ‘the unconquerable spirit and courage of the people of London’,” and, as time passed, “London’s survival of the Blitz became an icon for Englishness” (Giles and Middleton 1995, 113).

When considering the effect of WWII on England and the English “national character”, it is important to note that the country had not been assaulted from the Norman invasion in 1066 until the Second World War. Up until the 1930s, wars with other nations were fought on foreign ground, which left English women and children relatively safe on the other side of the channel. During World War II, however, the situation changed, when German air bombers assailed British cities. Children were suddenly active participants in the war. They were called upon to “do their part” by leaving the cities to stay with strangers in villages and farms in the countryside. This fact is relevant when reflecting why “the Blitz” has become an icon of Englishness in English children’s books.

I mentioned in the third chapter how relatively many contemporary English children's books revive WWII memories in one way or the other. A few of them are covered here, e.g. *Carrie's War* (Bawden 1973), *The Machine-Gunners* (Westall 1975), *Goodnight Mister Tom* (Magorian 1981), *The Kingdom by the Sea* (Westall 1990), *An Angel for May* (Burgess, 1992) and *The Butterfly Lion* (Morpurgo 1996).

Nina Bawden, the author of *Carrie's War* (1973), was fourteen when the Second World War broke out, and writes from experience as she was evacuated from London to Wales. Carrie, the protagonist of *Carrie's War* and her brother, Nick, are evacuees, sent to a Welsh mining town:

During the war - when England was at war with Germany. The Government sent the children out of the cities so they shouldn't be bombed. We weren't told where we were going. Just told to turn up at our schools with a packed lunch and a change of clothes, then we went to the station with our teachers. There were whole train-loads of children sent away like that.

(Bawden 1973, 2)

Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mister Tom* (1981) also draws on the evacuee experience during the "Blitz". Eight-year-old Willie Beech is transferred from a poorly London background to Tom Oakley's place in the country. Old Mister Tom Oakley is unprepared for what he sees in Willie: "The tales he had heard of evacuees didn't seem to fit Willie. "Ungrateful"" and "wild" were the adjectives he had heard used or just plain "homesick". He was quite unprepared for this timid, sickly little specimen" (Magorian 1981, 19). Old Mister Tom Oakley's heart goes out to the little boy and he gradually comes to realize that he cannot send Willie back to London. The third book which touches on evacuees is Melvin Burgess' *An Angel for May* (1992). Young Tam travels back in time to the Second World War and ends up on a farm owned by Sam Nutter, who has lost his daughter in the war, and adopted a strange little girl, May. Sam supposes Tam to be an evacuee and takes him in to play with May.

Evacuee stories revive memories of WWII and the times when the British nation had to huddle together and face the enemy. English children had to be "brave" and take part in

the national effort to resist the German bombers; it was a time when the nation was “whole”. In contemporary England, there is much disorder, as the recent Bradford race wars bear witness to, and the English are losing touch with their national identity. As Patrick Wright points out, stories from WWII can be useful in bringing together a disparate nation:

People are likely to be aware of enormous disruption as they think back over their lives: communities have been uprooted and destroyed (often as a result of ‘planned’ state development); the culture and also the social role of the family have changed; ideas and values have been ripped out of their customary correlation with the empirically given world; norms and ways of life – many of them stemming from an Imperial source – which seemed to stand firm as the ground on which History unfolded have been questioned and dismantled; everyday forms of face-to-face contact . . . have been devalued; insecurity – together with confusion, frustrated expectation and apprehension about the future, about what comes next . . .

Within this jarring present circumstance, memory becomes problematic for people from a variety of social backgrounds, and new coherences within publicly symbolised self-understanding therefore also become possible. Thus for example actual memories of the Second World War can be recuperated to a national mythologisation and redeclaration of that war.

(Wright 1985, 167)

One of the masters in recuperating memories from WWII and turning them into adventures for children is Robert Westall. He wrote several books based on his recollections as a schoolboy in North Shields during the war, two of which are covered here: *The Machine-Gunners* (1975) and *The Kingdom by the Sea* (1990). Chas, the hero of *The Machine-Gunners*, finds a crashed German airplane with machine gun. In the hope of contributing to the war effort, he and his three friends hide the gun in their secret underground shelter in order to get it back into working condition. The boys believe they can help defending their home by becoming “machine-gunners”, shooting down Jerry bombers. After the book was published, Robert Westall received a number of letters from people who had survived the Blitz, which he compiled in a book called *Children of the Blitz: Memories of Wartime Childhood* (Westall 1985). The fact that so many people needed to share their memories of the horrors and excitement of the Blitz shows the importance of this “national memory” for the fortification of English national identity. The hero of Westall’s *The Kingdom by the Sea* (Westall 1990), twelve-year-old Harry, finds

his home destroyed and his family believed killed in a German air raid. Knowing he will be placed with his cousins if found, Harry establishes his own kingdom by the sea near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, meeting all kinds of strange characters. A schoolmaster who lost his only son in the war provides shelter for Harry in an impulsive act of kindness.

In three of these WWII books, *Goodnight Mister Tom* (Magorian 1981), *The Kingdom by the Sea* (Westall 1990) and *An Angel for May* (Burgess, 1992), an older, lonely man, who has lost someone dear to him, takes in a child to treat as his own. It is an act of extreme patriotic kindness and “togetherness” – as the nation becomes one big family which cares for the orphans of war. In these, and the other English WWII books for children covered here, the different manner in which people have of enduring the war shows that although the nation is made up of unlike people, it *is* a nation. The hero’s strength is tested, his or her Britishness exposed. Harding, Phillips, and Michael Fogarty point out in the results of the EVSSG study mentioned earlier, the difference in the outcome for Britain on which values were most desirable for children to acquire:

Relative to other countries, the British are distinctive for the relatively strong emphasis they place on tolerance and respect for others, good manners, unselfishness, and obedience, and for the low emphasis (though not as low as in Ireland) on responsibility.

(Harding, et al. 1986, 19)

These British qualities were tested during the Second World War, and, as the children’s books show, the British endured. Such tolerance, respect and good manners are reflected in Robert Westall’s *The Kingdom by the Sea*, after Harry’s home has been ruined and he believes his parents and his sister are dead. The rescue team takes him away from the ruins: “Harry walked. He felt like screaming at them. Only that wouldn’t be a very British thing to do. But something kept building up inside him; like the pressure in his model steam-engine” (Westall 1990, 9). No matter how excited and upset he is, the twelve-year-old is a true English gentleman, calm and reserved. War gives one an opportunity to show courage and one’s best qualities, as opposed to modern life, which is not exciting at all, as Patrick Wright points out:

Abject and manipulative as it undoubtedly is, the public glorification of war can express the real counterpoint which the experience of war has provided to the routinised, constrained and empty experience of much modern everyday life.
(Wright 1985, 23)

Such glorification of war and revival of war memories is mocked, tongue-in-cheek, with a deep understanding of how manipulative they can be, by Geraldine McCaughrean in *Forever X* (1997).

Forever X (1997) is told from the viewpoint of Joy Shepherd: a teenager who feels she is not really in contact with life, merely a looker-on. When Joy is going on a holiday with her parents and younger brother Mel, their car breaks down and they seek shelter in a B&B with a “Forever X”-sign on the front. As it turns out, the place is run by the Partridges, who celebrate Christmas all year:

Fathers who worked overseas, nurses and policemen on duty over Christmas, relations visiting from Australia - anyone cheated of a traditional British Christmas with their children - could look to Forever Xmas to supply the full gamut of festivities, from a blazing log fire to a visit from Father Christmas.
(McCaughrean 1997, 8)

It is a place where Christmas is manufactured, but the guests are all very happy to be able to revive the “traditional British Christmas” they missed, and celebrate all the values associated with the holidays. Shortly after the Shepherds arrive, old grandpa F.C. dies. The British Legion, regular guests at the hotel, react in anger:

The men, though, being largely of military background, were forming ranks, preparing to be angry, compiling a list of their grievances against Forever Xmas: no turkey, no Santa, no coach, no presents.
(McCaughrean 1997, 77)

Later on, however, the British Legionnaires take part in searching for little Mel, and the women search the house. “Their husbands became military brisk, demanding maps, directions and, above all, information” (89). The lady of the house also draws on the nation’s shared military experiences: Ivy Partridge “looked more like Mrs. Miniver braving the Blitz” (98) – the image harking back to a World War II propaganda film from 1942. In the end, after little Mel has been found, the Partridges decide to change the name and theme of the hotel. Colin Partridge says:

‘Lots of nostalgia, we thought. Got to look ahead: nostalgia sells these days. . . We’ve got all the music and, you know, I video everything about Churchill. Hero of mine, always was.’ The ideas spilled out of him like bombs over Dresden. ‘Not that we want to glorify the fighting or owt, but the old folk, they’re so appreciative of everything. . . . Forever England. That’s what we thought we’d call it.’

(McCaughrean 1997, 106)

And they change the name of the B&B to “Forever England”. The Partridges have realized that the English nation appreciates heritage and prefers “old” memories to new experiences. Carole Scott observes the particularities of old nations with a heritage:

Nations with long histories look back on traditions which have defined their national personalities over the centuries. Their old people carry in their memories the patterns of life from which the present has grown, and form a human bridge between generations. They provide a sense of security for the next generations and a backdrop of cultural values and belief systems against which young people may define themselves.

(Scott 1997, 41)

Contemporary English children’s books serve to celebrate the “patterns of life” ingrained in the nation’s memory, in particular those more deeply ensconced in its “personalities” because of their association with war. They tend to allude to the courage, unselfishness and vigilance craved by war, not by alluding directly to WWII, but with indirect allusions to possible threats and acts of evil, which the English could prevent by drawing on the same qualities.

Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) particularly exposes England’s vigilance against an enemy invasion. The tale on which the story is based tells of 140 knights in silver armour, who dwell in a cave, at the ready to defend the country. The wizard Cadellin tells the children, Colin and Susan, that the knights are sleeping in Fundindelve, kept forever young by a magic spell, sealed in Firefrost, the Weirdstone of Brisingamen:

‘Here they lie in enchanted sleep,’ said the wizard, ‘until a day will come - and come it will - when England shall be in direct peril, and England’s mothers weep. Then out from the hill these must ride and, in a battle thrice lost, thrice won, upon the plain, drive the enemy into the sea.’

(Garner 1960, 12-13)

Therefore, Nastrond wants the stone, to conquer the country. It is up to Colin and Susan to show they have enough courage and selflessness to save it.

The possible foreign threat is also detectable in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (Dahl 1983), which was published shortly after the "Tories" took over English government, and after the Falklands War of 1982 had revived English patriotism. The Grand High Witch speaks like a German general in WWII films:

'You may rree-moof your vigs!' snarled The Grand High Witch. She had a peculiar way of speaking. There was some sort of a foreign accent there, something harsh and guttural, and she seemed to have trouble pronouncing the letter w. As well as that, she did something funny with the letter r. She would roll it round and round her mouth like a piece of hot pork-crackling before spitting it out.

(Dahl 1983, 69)

Not only does the Grand High Witch speak with a very German accent, she apparently has evil intentions:

So when I told my grandmother about the Delayed Action Mouse-Maker, and when I came to the bit about turning all the children of England into mice, she actually leapt out of her chair, shouting, 'I knew it! I knew they were brewing up something tremendous!'

(Dahl 1983, 130)

The boy and his grandmother decide that they have to stop the witches from getting to all the children of England. In order to prevent such evil, the boy shows utter selflessness; he risks his life when putting some "Mouse-Maker" into the witches' soup: "I had done it! Even if I never got back alive to my grandmother, the witches were still going to get the Mouse-Maker!" (Dahl 1983, 167). He is willing to die for his country.

A foreign threat to the English people is also portrayed in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995). When Lyra is on a boat with the Gyptians, rumours are spread about her, saying that she may be the only child to escape from the Gobblers, "and yet another rumour said it was no child but a fully grown human, shrunk by magic and in the pay of the Tartars, come to spy on good English people and prepare the way for a Tartar invasion" (Pullman 1995, 151). The willingness to go to war in order to prevent someone

else from performing evil deeds is portrayed in the next book in Pullman's trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* (1997). Lord Asriel is preparing a war against God Almighty; he invites witches to join his "army against the Authority" (Pullman 1997, 283). Ruta Skadi, a Latvian witch, tells the other witches:

"He showed me that to rebel was right and just, when you considered what the agents of the Authority did in his name. . . . and he told me of many more hideous cruelties dealt out in the Authority's name."

(Pullman 1997, 283)

Pullman portrays through the Latvian witch the willingness of the English to go to war if the cause is justifiable.

These contemporary English children's books reveal the nation's military background, which is especially prominent when compared to Icelandic children's books published in the same period. If WWII is mentioned in Icelandic children's literature, it concerns the friendly presence of British or American soldiers on Icelandic ground, and the money, work, and single mothers their presence produced. Foreign threats to people in Icelandic children's books come embodied in a single perpetrator, who is conquered with cunning, not weaponry. Sometimes the loss of Icelandic seamen during the war is mourned, but never glorified.

As stated in the beginning of this section, there is no doubt that people's national background affect their "way of thinking" and their reaction to events concerning their fellow citizens. Icelanders react not with revenge (they cannot afford to: there is no army to fight with), but with sadness, mourning and a quiet acceptance of fate – because this is what history has taught them. Those aspects of the Icelandic "national character" will be discussed in the next section, which surveys the notion of "being Icelandic".

5.5. Icelandic History, National Identity and National Character

"Tradition," I was told as an undergraduate, a propos of the British Empire in Australia and the culture of pagan Scandinavia as preserved in Iceland, "survives longest on the periphery." Now children's literature could be argued to be on the cultural "periphery" in several senses.

(Crago 1983, 61)

Hugh Crago may recall learning that Iceland is on the cultural periphery of the world, but the Icelanders certainly do not regard themselves as subordinate to other nations or far away from the hub of the world (no more than children's literature scholars wish to regard themselves "on the periphery"). In general, the Icelandic nation is immensely proud of its culture, history, landscapes and clean air – and this fact is reflected in Icelandic books for children, e.g. in Gudjon Sveinsson's *Ort rennur aeskublod* ("Young blood Flows Fast"):

Logi looked up in the sky and drew a deep breath of the unique, clear and nourishing air, which we Icelanders can still be proud of, while other nations can hardly breathe because of toxic materials in the air, which people have spread over their countries. There are positive sides of being an island nation in the North-Atlantic, even though the wind is sometimes cold. And with good sense, thrift and caution these qualities can be preserved: they can never be valued in terms of money, because life itself is more precious than any commodities.

(My transl., Sveinsson 1972, 43)

Sveinsson illuminates a number of features of "the Icelandic character" in this text.

Icelanders do not hesitate to claim their country to be better than any other country in the world, with the cleanest air, the most beautiful mountains, etc. They pride themselves in enduring the weather conditions, braving the cold winds, and they believe in preserving the qualities of their country. Dr. Terry G. Lacy, an American who moved to Iceland around 1980 to teach English Literature at the University of Iceland and has lived there ever since, provides a keen "foreigner's" eye view of the Icelanders. She comments: "Proud of having survived the exigencies of weather and history, they like to define themselves as different" (Lacy 1998, 9). The Icelanders also derive much strength from the fact that they live on an island, surrounded by the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans for hundreds of miles in all directions. As Stefan Olafsson points out, island people cling together: "The isolation that they often have to live with pushes the inhabitants together and supports the protection of traditions and old heritage (Olafsson 1985, 115).

The history of Iceland has had an influence on the essential "national character" in a number of ways. First, there is the nation's history of dealing with Mother Nature.

Icelandic history is scattered with volcano eruptions and earthquakes that have left deep crags in the landscape and covered whole communities with ash and lava. Terrible storms and enormous waves have claimed the lives of hundreds of seamen. Such atrocities have “moulded” the Icelandic character in a similar way that war has shaped the English character. There is no use for the Icelandic people to go to war against Nature – they have to accept that it gives and takes. This aspect of the Icelandic national character will be covered in the next section.

History has had many other effects on the national spirit. I have earlier recapped major events in the history of the Icelandic nation, mainly the Danish rule and the “unarmed” fight for the final freedom in 1944. As Jeremy Paxman puts it, “oppressed peoples remember their history. One-time oppressors forget it” (as quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company 2000, no pag.). The Icelandic people have used every opportunity to recall the nation’s fight for independence. It is important to note that the major freedom fighters were 19th century Romantics, led by Jon Sigurdsson (1811-1879). They used similar methods to stir the minds of their fellow countrymen as the Irish nationalists, here reiterated by Elleke Boehmer:

W.B. Yeats’s evocations of an ancestral ‘romantic Ireland’ offer a prototype of compensatory nationalist re-creation. . . . Yeats like later postcolonial writers drew upon his reading of myth and legend to forge an image of traditional Ireland. Like them, he valued the artifice of nostalgia, and sought to shape the future by redescribing the past. He believed in cultural retrieval, ‘the reawakening of imaginative life’, as a strengthening force for a nation.

(Boehmer, 1995, 119)

Similarly, the Icelandic Romantics sought out the sagas and folktales, and wrote poetry about the glories of the land, its language and its literature. According to Arnason, we have, on the one hand, the country, history and nature, on the other, the language and literature (Arnason 1999, 451). Together, these amalgamate into a Romantic notion. Because Iceland is one of the nations which remember its history, the Romantic concept has been kept alive, especially in children’s literature. Part of the Romanticism reveals itself in the belief that nature is “living”: a conviction that still has a large share in the

make-up of the Icelandic national character. It is related to the “reading” of landscape, discussed in Chapter 6. The next section, however, reviews how certain particularities of the Icelandic character are revealed in Icelandic children’s books: fatalism, dreams as a foreboding – which is extremely common in Icelandic children’s literature – and the glorification of seamanship: the most exalted (yet feared) trade in Iceland.

5.6. Fatalism, Dreams and Seamanship

The common Icelandic belief that destiny is predetermined derives mainly from the Icelanders’ interaction with nature and its atrocities. While the Icelandic people believe in divine providence – that one cannot change destiny – they can endure what fate has in store for them and keep hoping for better days. In her “analysis” of the Icelandic character referred to above, Terry Lacy points to studies which involved a “measurement” of happiness: “In the Gallup polls of 1984 and 1990 Iceland emerged as the happiest nation in the world” (Lacy 1998, 6). Lacy traces this happiness to the Icelander’s fatalistic belief, that everything will work out in the end. *Thad reddast* (“things will work out”) is a very familiar comment in Iceland, and, as Lacy comments, things usually do, whether it is a farmer who is faced with no hay or a chorus that has not practiced well enough for a concert.

The belief in divine providence is mirrored in a number of Icelandic children’s books, especially in historical novels or books from the 1970s and 1980s. It is frequently combined with superstition, and the belief that dreams act as a premonition for future events. In one of the oldest books covered here, Gudjon Sveinsson’s *Ort rennur aeskublod*, Logi, the 16-year-old hero, tells another young man that he should not curse the fog: “The fog is a princess under a spell, and she will not get out of the spell unless each man in the world stops cursing her” (Sveinsson 1972, 54). Later in the story, when Logi has become a seaman whose lines and hooks keep getting messed up, he has an instinct that the perpetrator is Jorundur, one of the crew: “He didn’t know if it was a coincidence or some dim premonition which revealed it to him – or was it fate?” (95). When

their ship gets into trouble sailing from Germany to Iceland, and two of the sailors are lost overboard, Jorundur is worried. He believes he is next, because “All things come in threes,” and Logi is shocked: “He found Jorundur’s exclamation horrible and yet foreboding” (Sveinsson 1972, 184-5). Luckily, Jorundur is saved, and his tempting fate does not lead to a tragedy.

The belief that one is not supposed to coax destiny by saying or doing certain things is extremely deeply rooted in the Icelandic national character, even in the modern day. A number of these things are related to the sea and seamanship. The two brothers, Steini and Halli, in Thorvaldur Saemundsson’s biographical account, *Bjartir dagar* (“Sunny Days” 1976), are sitting on the roof of a house, watching the sea, waiting for a boat. Suddenly Steini sees the boat; he jumps up and points at it:

“You mustn’t point at the boat, Halli,” I say reproachfully. “Don’t you know that it’s bad luck to point at a sailing ship? Mother says that if you do that, it could sink, and the whole crew could die.”

“I didn’t know that. She’s never told me so,” Halli says apologetically and moves away from the chimney.

“You’d better be careful because Nature has strange ways,” I say thoughtfully.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1976, 37)

The belief that pointing at a ship will sink it, has a tremendous effect on the narrator in Jonas Jonasson’s partly biographical account, *Polli, eg og allir hinir* (“Polli, me, and All the Others” 1973). At one point, he says to a friend “Someone said that a ship would sink like a stone only if you point at it” (Jonasson 1973, 11). When summer comes, the young boy is terribly bored after his best friend leaves Reykjavik for the country. Sulking, he walks down on the beach to watch a ship sail by. In his anger, he stubbornly points at the ship, finger high in the air. As he points at the ship, it sinks. The boy feels terrible about this, he stops eating, stops playing, convinced that it is all his fault – but he cannot tell anyone. Reading Saemundsson’s book, I, as a fellow Icелander, felt deeply for the boy: the superstition has been “bred into” me as well. Under no circumstances would I point at a sailing ship.

Fatalistic belief in connection with seamanship is also reflected in Elisabet Thorgeirsdottir's short story "Sjorinn" ("The Sea" 1985). After a boat is lost at sea, two women stand outside the fish-shop discussing the recent events:

- He wasn't planning to go sailing yesterday, but the man who was supposed to replace him was taken ill at the last moment, one of them said.
- He must have been destined to die, poor lad, the other one said and looked solemnly out over the sea, which now looked calm on the surface, but if you looked closer, you could see it was moving about. The surface was moving slowly as if everything was boiling underneath.
- Yes, and he was such a promising young man. But you can't save those that are destined to die or kill those that aren't. It's all up to him, the Creator.
- Yeah, it's all destined to happen, the other one added and then they both sighed like two women do when they agree on something but still want to discuss it.

(My transl., Thorgeirsdottir 1985, 47-48)

The young girl in the story, Gulla, wonders what it is to be destined to die and if God had let the man fall ill so Leifi would sail. The characters in modern Icelandic children's books seem more aware of the fatalistic belief ingrained in them: they question it and wonder about it, instead of taking it for granted like the child characters in books published in the 1970s or earlier. As an example, Ormur, a 17-year-old boy in Olafur H. Simonarson's *Gauragangur* ("All Hell Loose" 1988), feels his inborn fatalistic belief sweep over him after a heated argument with his girlfriend:

Around midnight, when I was sitting in the rattling Skoda, a feeling came over me: that this was supposed to happen. Had I become fatalistic? Or had I just realized the principle of life that everything always turns for the worst: flowers blossom in brilliant colour for a fraction of a moment, then they disappear into the wind; you walk around, head high, with your opinions on various things, but the next moment you are tired, bent, terrified like a straw which hears the swish of the grim reaper's scythe.

(My transl., Simonarson 1988, 243)

While questioning and perhaps denying his fatalistic belief, Ormur expresses a characteristically Icelandic predisposition: that men are, like flowers, destined to die; fate is inescapable. One is supposed to live proudly, blossom in brilliant colour while he or she can, and then accept what life hands out.

Most Icelanders believe in dreams as a premonition: it is a conviction which originates in the time of the sagas, when dreams revealed what would later happen. Consequently,

Icelandic children's books abound with dreams that predict a string of events. In one of the oldest books discussed here, Gudjon Sveinsson's *Ort rennur aeskublod* ("Young Blood Flows Fast" 1972), Logi is on his boat at sea, and the wind is beginning to blow as he takes a short nap. He dreams that he and Sturla, his brother, are walking up the river near their farm. He falls into the river and cannot shout for help. Then he hears Sturla say: "Catch the end, look out for the end" (Sveinsson 1972, 165). Logi wakes up, and finds the boat is sinking. He manages to save the lives of the whole crew by grabbing the end of the string which inflates the life-saving boat.

A dream also serves to alert Steini, the young boy in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar strond* ("Childhood's Coast" 1973). He has problems going to sleep on the night before he is to go sailing with his father:

Finally, though, I fell asleep and I dreamt that a red, vicious bull was chasing me on the sand below our farm. Thanks to my fast feet, I managed to get up on a high cliff on the beach. The bull was standing below me, foaming at the mouth, but it couldn't reach me because the cliff was high and provided excellent shelter.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1973, 68)

The next day, the boy and his father get caught in a storm at sea, but they manage, just in time, to get the boat ashore. Dreams also occur in Gudlaug Richter's historical novel, *Sonur Sigurdar* ("Son of Sigurd" 1987). Grjotgardur, the hero, dreams that he and his stepbrother, Thorstein, are standing outside their farm and see a snake slithering towards them from the next farm. Grjotgardur wakes up as it crawls across him and attacks Thorstein (Richter 1987, 33). He warns his stepbrother, but Thorstein says dreams have no meaning. "Nobody can escape his fate, Grjotgardur," he says (Richter 1987, 34). At the end of the story, the neighbouring farmer kills Thorstein.

Prognostic dreams carry on in even more recent Icelandic children's literature. Snorri, the young boy in *Silfur Egils* dreams that a man he saw in Paris enters his room and tries to strangle him – a threat which is later revealed for real ("Egil's Silver" Davidsdottir 1989, 74). Hakon, a 15-year-old in *Brak og brestir* ("Squeaking and Screeching" Jonsson 1993)

has inherited his grandmother's ability to foresee events – and his dream helps him to locate two boys that have fallen down a crack in the glacier. Metta, a young girl in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Her a reiki* ("Spirits in the Air" 1996) has recurrent dreams that people are trying to chase her away from the farm where she spends the summer. Finally, she dreams of horses and a landslide: a dream which leads her to the place where an amulet is kept, the only thing that can protect her from evil spirits (Hrolfsdottir 1996, 44; 118; 144). The young girl, Magga, in Illugi Jokulsson's *Silfurkrossinn*, sees the shadow of a monk in three consecutive dreams, and actually "sees" him for the fourth time, on Christmas Eve (Jokulsson 1996, 75).

Dreams as a premonition harks back to the sagas, for instance to Gudrun in Laxdaela Saga, who dreamt four dreams which served to signify her four husbands. Reliance on dreams has followed the Icelandic nation throughout history, and contemporary children's authors highlight that faith. When a character in an English children's book has a bad dream it may signify a worried mind, but the reader of an Icelandic children's book reads more into the dream: it foreshadows an event. The belief in dreams, apparitions and a predestined life is a strong element in the Icelandic character, dating back to the sagas and Norse mythology. Philip Pullman, familiar with the Icelandic sagas, assigns a fatalistic belief to the Lapland witches in *Northern Lights* (Pullman 1995). "We are all subjects to the fates," Serafina Pekkala tells Lee Scoresby, who is a keener spokesman for a modern existential belief (Pullman 1995, 310). Roald Dahl also expresses Norwegian fatalism in the text from *The Witches* already quoted above, when Granny says: "But over in Norway where I come from, we are quite used to these sort of happenings. We have learnt to accept them as part of everyday life" (Dahl 1983, 180). People of "the North", subject to all kinds of weather and an unstable environment, have been shaped by the circumstances and have gradually adapted to them.

National identity is obviously a multi-faceted phenomenon. Although some reject the notion of a “national character”, English and Icelandic children’s books show that there are several instances where particularities that are deemed “typical” of a nation, are reflected in the text. England’s history of war has had its effects on the national character, which are notable in people’s outlook as expressed in English children’s literature texts. Likewise, the Icелander’s refusal to be beaten by nature’s forces and Danish authorities made them learn to take things in stride and accept whatever fate had in store for them. We have seen that national identity is strongly associated with language and national history. Landscape is another factor which has a heavy impact on national identity, and the next two chapters concentrate on surveying that effect.

CHAPTER 6

HOME

Around the idea of settlement, nevertheless, a real structure of values has grown. It draws on many deep and persistent feelings: an identification with the people among whom we grew up; an attachment to the place, the landscape, in which we first lived and learned to see. I know these feelings at once, from my own experience. The only landscape I ever see, in dreams, is the Black Mountain village in which I was born. When I go back to that country, I feel a recovery of a particular kind of life, which appears, at times, as an inescapable identity, a more positive connection than I have known elsewhere. Many other men feel this, of their own native places, and the strength of the idea of settlement, old and new, is then positive and unquestioned. But the problem has always been, for most people, how to go on living where they are.

(Williams 1985, 84)

Raymond Williams touches here on a number of aspects connected with the idea of personal and national identity. First, the “attachment” to the people and the place where he grew up, where he first lived and “learned to see.” Second, his feelings for the Black Mountain village, his “country”. Third, the problem for people of going on living where they are *now*, while the tie of their childhood home – the “inescapable” identity – keeps pulling them back to that place (which is, in all probability, gone).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Tony Watkins distinguishes between three kinds of home, somewhat parallel to Williams’ notion: first as an interior space, second, the homeland (in country or city) and third, a *heimat* that human beings inevitably strive for (Watkins 1992, 183). Peter Wallace Preston also uses three concepts to define the essence of identity:

The substantive business of identity can be unpacked in terms of the ideas of locale, network and memory. This trio points to the ways in which we inhabit a particular place, which is the sphere of routine activity and interaction and is richly suffused with meanings, which in turn is the base for a dispersed series of networks of exchanges with others centred on particular interests, all of which are brought together in the sphere of continually reworked memory.

(Preston 1997, 43-44)

Like Watkins' three concepts of home, Preston's "trio" parallels Raymond Williams' notion – and in the same order.

This chapter and the following one review how the three different, yet connected, concepts of home and identity are reflected in English and Icelandic children's books, according to Williams, Watkins and Preston's triadic order:

1. The attachment to the place where one grows up and learns "to see" (Williams), the "interior space" (Watkins), or one's "locale" (Preston).
2. The feelings for one's village and "country" (Williams), the "homeland" in country or city (Watkins), or the wider "network" of exchanges (Preston).
3. The impossible return to that "inescapable entity" (Williams), the *heimat* we strive for (Watkins), or the "memory" of the childhood home (Preston).

The focus of this chapter is on the attachment to the locale of home, the interior space and the landscape where one grows up. In Chapter 7, I discuss the homeland, country and city, and *heimat* – or the inescapable memory of the childhood home.

I have divided this chapter into five sections which correspond to the "interior space" (Watkins), or the "locale . . . richly suffused with meanings" (Preston) where a person learns "to see" (Williams). The first section revolves around the physical "home", the attachment to the place where one grows up, and the second one centres on the unique "absorption" of childhood landscape through the five senses. The "seeing" or "reading" of landscape is reviewed in the third section and continues in the fourth and fifth sections, which pinpoint particularities of "reading" landscape in England and Iceland: the English "landscape of class" and the Icelandic "living landscape".

The theoretical framework used for analysing the children's literature texts in this and the next chapter is drawn from humanistic geography. Yi-Fu Tuan explains that the aim in humanistic geography is to achieve an understanding of the human world by studying people's subjective relations to nature, their geographical behaviour, and their feelings and

ideas with regard to space and place (Tuan 1976, 266). Although the study of landscape in literature concerns itself with texts and the way that landscape is represented and reproduced in them – using literary methods – it has also profited from expanding its theoretical considerations to include works from the area of geography. Geographer J. Douglas Porteous comments: “One of the approaches of humanistic geography involves the critical assessment of imaginative literature for its insights into the relationship between inner and outer landscapes” (Porteous 1990, 9). For the purpose of studying this relationship, I have reviewed writings by humanistic geographers and applied some of their methods of analysis to the selected children’s literature texts. Yi-Fu Tuan points out that literature is in many ways similar to environmental experience, because literature expresses subjective meanings concerning space, place and environment in words, while at the same time making those experiences concrete (Tuan 1978B). In literature, we find landscape that is experienced and recreated through the imagination of the writer. Children’s books are particularly suitable for “reading” the cultural meanings imposed upon landscape, and the meaning of a “home” in the world, as this chapter, and the next, show.

6.1. Home, Family and Locality

My body is my childhood, such as history made it.
(Barthes 1987, 18; as quoted in Duncan and Duncan 1992, 34)

Landscape is a part of a person’s identity: the landscape one grew up in, the landscape one has lived in, absorbed, travelled through – and read about. Identity is something that begins taking shape as individuals form a connection between them and their physical and cultural environment.

The question of identity could, according to P. W. Preston, depend on the answers to some basic questions like: “Who are you?” (subject), “What is your name?” (family), “Where do you live?” (The street, the neighbours, local shops), “Where are you from?” (village, town, country), etc. (Preston 1997, 44-47). Whereas the two preceding chapters

concentrated on the subject itself at the centre, his or her “socialization” and invisible bonding with other members of the the family and the nation, here the individual’s attachment to his or her physical environment – the “locale” and the childhood attachment with the surrounding landscape – is examined.

P. W. Preston points out how much the home and the family mean for the construction of identity:

The family sphere is the most immediate location for those sets of relationships which constitute identity . . . In a similar way the locality will have a particular extent, a territory within which routine patterns of activity and understanding are pursued, places which are visited, places which were visited, places rich in association.

(Preston 1997, 47)

In Chapter 4, I have already discussed the “routine patterns of activity”, but the relevance here is on place, or the territory where these patterns are made.

The concept of home is central to children’s books, which very often revolve around the idea of home, loss of home and retrieval of home. A majority of children’s books entail travelling from home, facing adventure or danger, and returning to the safety of home with greater wisdom. Christopher Clausen states that the return to home is what makes the difference between a children’s story and one for adults, and takes Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) as an example. Clausen states: “When home is a privileged place, exempt from the most serious problems of life and civilization – when home is where we ought, on the whole, to stay – we are probably dealing with a story for children” (Clausen 1982, 143). Peter Hunt agrees that the journey is “a central, vital element of children’s literature” – a circular journey which enables the reader to gain knowledge, “possibly to be stabbed by experience,” and return to the security of home (Hunt 1987, 11).

Home is more than a place, as Patrick Wright points out, referring to Agnes Heller’s *A Theory of Feelings* (1979). Wright claims: “‘Home’ is that ‘firm position’ which is

‘integral to the average everyday life.’ ‘Home’ is the familiar point at the centre of everyday life and as such it is not just a matter of bricks, mortar and a door to close on the world” (Heller 1979, 184; Wright 1985, 10-11). Home is in particular the centre of everyday life for children; it is where the child learns how to communicate with and travel through the outside world. David Sibley claims:

The home is one place where children are subject to controls by parents over the use of space and time and where the child attempts to carve out its own spaces and set its own times. The possibilities for conflict here are considerable. Children may find the domestic regime oppressive because of rigid parental control of space, the availability of space in the home may limit opportunities for children to secure privacy, adults may feel that children get in the way and so on. These problems clearly spill over into public spaces. For example, children playing out with their friends or walking to school are affected by controls exercised in the family.

(Sibley, 1995A, 129)

For these reasons, the interplay between the interior space of the home and the exterior space of the world outside is important: home determines how the child will behave in the world outside – and activities in the world outside affect the home. Examples of such interplay abound in children’s books. As for the former, parents in children’s books set boundaries that children are not supposed to cross when they leave the house; boundaries formerly set by fairy tales and legends. Little Red Riding Hood’s mother told her little girl that she was not supposed to wander into the wild forest where the devilish wolf dwells: the girl should have hurried along the safe path. Natalie’s father in Anne Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* (1996) accordingly draws a boundary between her house and the house of Tulip: a friend he does not want her to associate with. The limit is set at a dark belt of trees at the edge of their garden. But Natalie wants to cross the border, and wonders why:

Had I, for once, something to tell her that I should be brave enough to sidle to the edge of the lawn, then so casually slip out of sight in the shadows? Those huge, overhanging trees must have given a sense of foreboding to the venture. But I didn’t falter, and, out in the sunlight again, stayed on the far side of the fence till I was beyond the view from the highest Palace window.

(Fine 1996, 23)

Natalie has a home, where rules are prescribed and boundaries are set, and she is expected to adhere them. She does not have a private “house” to live in, as her parents run someone else’s hotel in which they live, but it is her home. Tulip, in contrast, has a “house” which

is not a home, just bricks and mortar. Natalie's father comments that he had heard a local policeman tell his wife: "'It isn't a home,' he told her. 'That house is just a cold shell keeping the rain off three people'" (Fine 1996, 166). A home is a place where a child feels safe, protected, and it forms patterns for it to follow. Natalie is disgusted by Tulip's home, the stained carpets and battered furniture, and especially what it does to Tulip, making her "just a shell, an imitation of herself (Fine 1996, 23-24). The home is just a shell, keeping the rain out, and in turn it has made Tulip a shell, with no patterns to her feelings and no rules to follow, no boundaries that she must not cross. Tulip therefore crosses all boundaries, breaks all the rules, and destroys Natalie's home, burning it down.

The fact that Natalie's home is burned down reflects an anxiety: a modern fear about losing one's home. The menace comes from a child which society has neglected, in fact rejected – and therefore also exposes other anxieties of the English society in the 1990s. Douglas Kellner points out how the fear of losing one's home is reflected in the horror movie *Poltergeist*:

The American dream has traditionally focused on buying and owning one's own home and in an era of accelerating unemployment, a weak economy, and diminishing discretionary income, fear of losing one's home, or not being able to maintain it, accelerated during the 1980s.

(Kellner 1995, 131)

This fear is mirrored in *The Tulip Touch* (1996), and in Garfield's *John Diamond* (1980), when Shot-in-the-Head, a slum boy from London, consumed with envy, burns down William's secure Hertford home. Horrors stemming from children living in indecent homes or having no home at all become "symbolic allegories" for contemporary anxieties, as Douglas Kellner calls it (Kellner 1995, 131).

Home for children generally means where the family is, and home, and the landscape of home, becomes a kind of a parent, whose blood flows through the veins of the child it once bore, forming an attachment, which can never be broken. This idea is ingeniously illustrated in Peter Dickinson's *Tulku* (1979). The protagonist, 13-year-old Theodore, has

been brought up in a mission settlement in China, where his father is head of the Settlement. The Settlement suffers an attack: it is burned down and Theodore's father is killed. Later, after travelling for miles from the place, Theodore's father and the landscape of the Settlement become one in Theodore's mind:

Father had been a wonderful man, good and clever and kind, but his personality had been so strong that it had filled the Settlement. You breathed and ate and drank Father. Sometimes he was a cliff towering above you; at other times you swam in the lake of his love. But all the time you were somehow inside him, as the unhatched bird is in its shell.

(Dickinson 1979, 82)

The amalgamation of home and his dead father stays with Theodore after he has left his childhood landscape. Benni, a young character in an Icelandic children's book, Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Thad sem enginn ser* ("What No-One Can See" 1998), also mingles the memory of his dead father with the landscape they shared in Hofn by Hornafjord. Following the drowning of his father, Benni moves to Reykjavik.

He longingly thought of Hornafjord, where he had lived and felt good. From Hofn you could see many glaciers and mountains that he and his father talked about climbing, and there were also lakes where they had planned to catch some trout.

(My transl., Hrolfsdottir 1998, 5)

To Benni, the loss of childhood landscape is combined with the loss of his father and their shared activities in the cherished landscape.

"Home" means "family" to most children and home is also familiarity – where everything is well known and therefore we miss it when away from home. Reuben in Rosemary Harris' *The Moon in the Cloud* (1968) misses the night sky of his home, because he has "studied the night sky until each star or planet seems like a personal and magnificent friend" (Harris 1968, 72). Homesickness is a longing for familiarity, as Denys C.W.

Harding points out:

[In homesickness] it seems likely that although the conscious longing may be for familiar places and physical surroundings, the house, the village, the scenery and so on, these ultimately derive their value from associations with the people to whom we are attached; that very word 'familiar' underlines the fact.

(Harding 1953, 69)

Home is a fusion of family and territory: one's own "turf", so to say. Knowledge of the surroundings and the importance of family are expressed in Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), when the group of rabbits try to settle in a new hole:

The new hole was short, narrow and rough . . . For the first time, Hazel began to realise how much they had left behind. The holes and tunnels of an old warren become smooth, reassuring and comfortable with use. There are no snags or rough corners. Every length smells of rabbit - of that great, indestructible flood of Rabbitry in which each one is carried along, surefooted and safe. The heavy work has all been done by countless great-grandmothers and their mates. All the faults have been put right and everything in use is of proved value. The rain drains easily and even the wind of mid-winter cannot penetrate the deeper burrows.

(Adams 1972, 56)

Home as a safe place, surrounded with family and familiarity is also interpreted through animal figures in Melvin Burgess' *The Cry of the Wolf* (1990). Greycub is an orphaned wolf cub, saved by John Tilley and put in a kennel to grow up among the dogs:

For a young dog, growing up among the smells of his own kind, this reassuring wind of their own dogginess is the first door to knowing who and what they are. Surrounded by an atmosphere of dog, they are dog themselves, inside and out.

(Burgess 1990, 47)

This is a home for dogs and Greycub does not belong there. "But already he was marked apart. He did not quite belong. He knew it, and the other pups knew it" (Burgess 1990, 47). Greycub is living on their territory; he cannot claim it as his own. Home as familiarity is also expressed through an animal in Henrietta Branford's *Fire, Bed and Bone* (1997) – a story told by an old dog owned by a couple in an English village:

I know where the rabbits creep out from their burrows. I know where the wicked wildcat leaves her stink on the grass as she passes. I know where the foxes hunt, where deer step out on fragile legs to graze. I know where the wild boar roots and where the great bear nurses. I know where the little grey bear with the striped face digs for bluebell bulbs in springtime, when the woods are full of hatchlings that fall into your mouth, dusted with down, and the rabbits on the bank are slow and sleek and foolish.

(Branford 1997, 8-9)

English writers seem to be more comfortable expressing the idea of home and territory through animals than through people. According to R. Ardrey, man is no less a territorial animal than, for instance, the rabbits on *Watership Down*:

Man. . . is as much a territorial animal as is a mockingbird singing in the clear California night. We act as we do for reasons of our own evolutionary past, not our cultural present. . . If we defend the title to our land or the sovereignty of our

country, we do it for reasons no different, no less innate, no less ineradicable, than do lower animals. . . . all of us will give everything we are for a place of our own. Territory, in the evolving world of animals, is a force perhaps older than sex.
(Ardrey 1967; as quoted in Johnston 1991, 187)

Gillian Cross' portrays in *Wolf* (1990) that the animal instinct is still there. Cassy's father, Mick Phelan, is an IRA bomber, and her mother, Goldie, explains to the girl that her father has been "like a wolf, fighting for its own territory" (Cross 1990, 48). Lyall, Goldie's boyfriend tells Cassy that "Lots of people fight for lost causes. Especially when it's to do with territory" (101). When Cassy sees her father, she conceives of him as a territorial animal: "Instinctively he had marked out the room, as a wolf marks out his own territory" (Cross 1990, 132).

Man is a territorial animal, and no matter how "bad" the territory is (or may seem to others), people need to mark it as their own, to familiarize themselves with the surroundings, to feel the place is *theirs*. Yi-Fu Tuan says this is a matter of cultural conditioning:

Consider the case of children brought up in urban slums. They do not yearn for the fresh air of summer camps. To adults of middle-class background, certain parts of Brooklyn are a 'concrete jungle.' To children raised there, however, they are not so much a jungle as their *turf*, borrowing a terms that suggests ordered space. In comparison with the known turf, the world of summer camps seems alien and threatening.

(Tuan 1978A, 10)

Tuan goes on to discuss a study made by social workers Riccio and Slocum in 1962, which involved taking a teenage gang from Brooklyn to a park in New Jersey. The teenagers were terrified by the surroundings – and yet the same kids would fight a gang war with bats, knives, and even guns (Tuan 1978A, 10-11). The *turf* of one's childhood is familiar because it has been absorbed by the senses, seen with a child's eyes – whether in city or in country – and mapped out in the child's mind, marked as its territory. That mapping by the senses constitutes *home*.

Marking one's territory becomes increasingly important in the city, particularly in English books, where each person has to fight for a space to live in. Rocky, the protagonist of Sylvia Sherry's *A Pair of Jesus Boots*, lives in a slum district of Liverpool, which is *his* turf: "The streets were *his* world – and he knew those in his own territory very well" (Sherry 1969, 16). Rocky has absorbed the landscape through his senses and incorporated it into the map in his mind: "He found his way through the square by instinct, not sight" (Sherry 1969, 74). The hero of Bernard Ashley's *A Kind of Wild Justice*, Ronnie, lives in London's East End. The sign on his house (and most other houses in the neighbourhood) is "decorated with curls of aerosol spray" (Ashley 1978, 67). Still, Ronnie can find his house without any difficulty. "How did a fox know his own den? Little things. A broken window, a spray pattern on the wall" (Ashley 1978, 68). To Ronnie, these are the familiar things of his environment, and he feels a stranger to the French country landscape on a trip to Paris:

In his hopeful mood after the discovery, they'd been going through rolling green countryside, with the sun shining and the coach bowling along. But now they were in traffic, crawling through the industrial build-up of north Paris, looking out at the sunless streets which were more like home. It was all much more realistic.
(Ashley 1978, 158)

A "slum" kid has to know and defend his or her territory, and that is most important to survive there. Young Kevin in John Rowe Townsend's *Gumble's Yard* (1961), thinks his sister, Sandra, will not have much chance of a romance in their part of the city, but at least "She'll know which shop to buy her potatoes in, and that's more important" (Townsend 1961, 52). Knowing one's way to the shops by instinct is what counts when one is stuck in that neighbourhood for life.

Icelandic children's writers do not allude as often to markings of space as their English colleagues. As referred to earlier, there is no lack of space in Iceland – a person in Iceland has eighty times more space than a person in the United Kingdom. Although Reykjavik has become a large city, it is very much spread, with a lot of open spaces. Generally, "home" is expressed very much in Icelandic children's literature as a family place of

routine activities, with “comforting” rules. As discussed in the last chapter, routine activities, rituals and customs, are very important to identity and a feeling of “home” in the world. To Emil, in Gudmundur Olafsson’s *Emil og Skundi* (1986), home means sitting in the kitchen, having his favourite meal. When away from home, this is what he thinks about: “And he dreamed of being back in the warmth of his kitchen, drinking milk and eating biscuits” (Olafsson 1986, 98). Whereas English children’s books reflect the English preference for setting boundaries, the child characters in Icelandic children’s books know hardly any boundaries. Icelandic children are not “grounded”, and in fact, Icelanders are very lenient with their children, as Terry Lacy points out:

Icelanders are also typically patient with children, realizing that the child will grow up if helped and given a chance. The Icelandic child is virtually never corrected in front of anyone other than the immediate family and is almost never spanked.

(Lacy 1998, 8)

Lacy comments in a footnote to this section that, “Like their parents, Icelandic children go to bed later than is usual in other western countries; the average bedtime for eleven year olds, for instance, is about 11.30 p.m.” (footnote 17 for Chapter 1 Lacy 1998, 8). Yet, children, wherever they are, find rules comforting, as Ingibjorg Moller’s *Radgata um raudanott* shows (“A Mystery in the Middle of the Night” 1998). A group of children, including Kamilla and Bardi, have decided to spend the night on an uninhabited island near Reykjavik (older children are often allowed on outings without parental guidance in Iceland). On the island, they discuss if they would be allowed to stay longer, and what to say to their parents:

Camilla took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. “I don’t have to say anything. Mum has a new boyfriend and they’ll be glad to get rid of me.”

“Lucky you,” Bardi said.

“I wish that sometimes she’d forbid me to do something. Then I’d know she cares a bit about me,” Kamilla muttered so quietly that you could hardly hear it.

(My transl., Moller 1998, 51)

For children, rules are part of home, and home is a place that children form an attachment to, because it generally offers both family and familiarity. Icelandic and English children’s books show the importance of these elements in the process of identity-formation and the

development of “home-ties”. If either family or familiarity is lacking, one’s concept of identity and one’s outlook on life is affected.

6.2. Home Affinity

There is a special period, the little-understood, prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve—between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence—when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition.

(Cobb 1969, 123-24)

As Edith Cobb observes in “The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood”, we have all gone through a particular stage of our childhood when we experienced the natural world in “some highly evocative way.” At this stage, the senses seem acutely aware of the environment, absorbing the sights, smells and sounds of the interior home and the exterior landscapes around the home in a way that we are never again able to repeat. Thus absorbed, the sensations and sounds of home stay with a person throughout life: they form an inevitable part of his or her identity.

This section focuses on the multisensory experiences of childhood, linking them with the fact that children’s authors need to relive those “home” sensations because they are habitually writing from the viewpoint of a child, and therefore the environment in which they grew up in heavily influences their writing. English and Icelandic particularities are surveyed, i.e. the class-related English notion that a person belongs to a certain landscape and to no other landscapes, and the Icelandic view that only the toughest survive in the barren landscapes of Iceland.

Our environment becomes real to us through the senses: we see a wide mountainous valley, smell freshly-cut grass, taste sour rhubarb, touch the smooth surface of a stone found on the sea shore and hear the sound of geese disappearing towards the horizon. At the same time, these sensual experiences very often become associated with memory: the

valley where you broke your leg on a scout expedition, the sweet-smelling grass that Uncle Harry cut with his scythe, the stolen rhubarb from old Mrs. Sherrat's backyard, the silky stone your childhood friend gave you when the two of you were wading on the shore in Cornwall, and the geese you longingly watched flying south the autumn when granny died.

I associate each of these examples with childhood remembrances on purpose, because the memories of childhood are much more strongly associated with the senses of smell and taste and sound than adult memories. J. Douglas Porteous points out that "in childhood, we are dealing with a multisensory experience, where the non-visual senses have a much greater importance than is ever recognized in the blandscapes of adulthood" (Porteous 1990, 149). Porteous also notes that children do not control their sensory input, they "do not censor experience." Therefore, the environment has a deeper impact that lasts for life. It is important to note that environment is not simply "received" through the visual experience. As Rob Shields puts it: "There is tremendous complicity between the body and environment and the two interpenetrate each other" (Shields 1991, 14).

The interpenetration of child and landscape, and the conscious absorption of landscape into the mind are masterfully portrayed in Lesley Howarth's *MapHead* (1995). The protagonist, Boothe, or MapHead, can lay himself down on the landscape and absorb it into his body; he *is* a part of the landscape:

Every place he visited, MapHead saw everything everyone else saw and quite a lot else besides. Sometimes there were ghosts. Sometimes hidden watercourses way underground would tug at his arms so they twitched like a dowser's rod. Wherever he went with Powers, he sensed the secrets that every bluff and valley wore under its everyday face. It was a view that fitted snugly round the real world like a skin on an orange; a subtle world in which Powers flashed from place to place as casually as a tramp might hitch a ride - a world that MapHead had grown up with.
(Howarth 1995, 11-12)

MapHead can flash up landscapes and maps on his face, and thus retrieve places; his absorbed landscapes are visible through the transparent skin on his clean-shaven head.

A conscious absorption of landscape is, of course, one of the ideas of Romanticism, celebrated by English Romantic poets, such as Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Romanticism tends to linger on in children's books, much more obviously in Icelandic children's books, however, than the English ones. It is, for example, very evident in Eiríkur Sigurdsson's *Strakar í Straumey* ("Boys in the Isle of Straum: A Boys' Story" 1969). The two brothers are sailing away from the uninhabited Puffin Island in a small boat: "It was now very late, so most of the birds had settled in the cliff. The quiet of the night trickled into the young boys' souls and they felt as they were part of the nature all around them" (Sigurdsson 1969, 68). Intercommunication between man and landscape is also detected in Larus Mar Björnsson's *K/K: Keflavíkurdagar/Keflavíkurnætur* ("K/K: Keflavík Days/Keflavík Nights"), when a boy senses the arrival of summer through his fingertips: "I touch one of the stones in the pavement with my fingertips. It feels warm. My fingers absorb the heat. It is like the pavement is saying: Now summer is arriving" (Björnsson 1995, 222).

The notion that man is part of nature or its landscapes is recurrent in both English and Icelandic children's books, but the interpretation of that notion is noticeably different. Icelanders are very fond of the idea of "roots" in the landscape of childhood, often referring to them as an almost physical notion. Brandur, an old man in Gudjon Sveinsson's *Ort rennur aeskublod* (1972) tells the young man that he was very young when he left home. "Times were different then. I couldn't say if they were any worse or better than now, but one thing I know for sure, that from this same soil the Icelanders that are now living, sprouted, and the relations are strong" (Sveinsson 1972, 40). Thorvaldur Saemundsson also uses the allegory of plants to depict roots in a native landscape, however harsh the environment is, however much it tries to drive one away, when describing the growth on the seaside of his native village:

There is the spoonwort, which is nutritious and has, like several other plants, saved many a human life in earlier times, when hunger and duress reigned in the country and people had to eat what they could find. Although the spoonwort is unassuming, almost timid where it lies in its shadowed crags, it will not be budged

by the occasional icy and wet smacking from the daughters of Aegir [sea god in Norse mythology]. This is its home, and nobody is capable of shifting it, neither man nor higher powers.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1973, 12)

The spoonwort reaches a higher status through its help in providing sustenance for a starving nation. Like the Icelandic people, it has withstood the harsh elements, and, like them, will not be budged: it has an almost human-like determination.

A similar symbolism is evident in Gudlaug Richter's *Jora og eg* (1988), which is set in 12th century Iceland. The Bishop wants Gamli, his treasured scribe, to move to Skalholt, the bishopric of Iceland, where he and his family will be well provided for. Gamli says his mother would never consent:

She has lived here all of her life and knows every tussock and every hill. As both of us know, some plants thrive best in rocky ground and wither away and die if they are transplanted to fertile soil.

(My transl., Richter 1988, 54)

Understandably, throughout centuries of volcano eruptions, shattering earthquakes, and prevailing harsh weather conditions, the Icelanders have *needed* to believe they could not thrive on other, more fertile and friendlier, ground. At the end of the 19th century, after a series of volcanic eruptions, which destroyed a large part of the country and killed most of its livestock, the Canadian government offered Icelanders a chance to move to Manitoba and get their own land for free. A mass emigration followed. Those who persisted used arguments such as these, that people thrive best in the ground that produced and nurtured them. In a way, they were right. As Kristin Steinsdottir's *Vestur i blainn* ("Westwards Into the Blue" 1999) shows, the Icelanders that left had no idea how to survive the extreme frosts of the Canadian winter: they had never fished through ice, and many starved to death. They were also unfamiliar with the vegetation, and some died after eating what they thought was angelica – but was in fact a deadly poisonous plant.

Whereas Icelandic children's books reflect the idea that people have grown into the landscape of their childhood and sprouted roots that cannot be broken, getting stronger for

withstanding the bizarre weather conditions, English children's books tend to denote to a more class-related notion: that people are born into a certain landscape, they belong there, it is an element of their character – and they should not try to be anything else. I have previously raised the question of the three major definitions of classes referred to by cultural materialists: the proletariat (the “lower” or “working classes”), the bourgeoisie (“middle classes”) and the aristocracy. I have also pointed out that Iceland considers itself to be a “class-less” society – there are no comparably clear class definitions in Iceland: no “blue-collar” or “white-collar” divisions of Government workers, for example.

The idea that people are shaped by their birth ground and that they belong to it is, as stated, apparent in many English children's books. Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) offers a prime example of a class-ordained landscape. After Rat and Mole come back from their disastrous visit to the Wild Wood, they are relieved to see familiar surroundings again:

Mole saw clearly that he was an animal of the tilled field and hedgerow, linked to the ploughed furrow, the frequented pasture, the lane of evening lingerings, the cultivated garden-plot. For other the asperities, the stubborn endurance, or the clash of actual conflict, that went with Nature in the rough.

(Grahame 1908, 45)

The meaning of landscape in *The Wind in the Willows* is surveyed by Timothy E. Cook, who explores the political meaning of landscape by contrasting the freedom of choice in Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) to what he calls the “order” of Grahame's book (1908). Cook observes:

Baum and Grahame thus present quite alternative arcadias. . . . To Baum, individuals should seek to define their destinies by voluntarily forming an egalitarian community that can reshape their future. To Grahame, individuals should accept their foreordained place in hierarchical society for their own good and the good of others.

(Cook 1988, 45)

Cook adds that perhaps this is a simplified contrast of English and American political cultures, but “an inviolable order is rarely found in American children's books” (Cook 1998, 45).

A connection between place in landscape and place in society is also detectable in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967). Alison, a young English girl, has inherited a house in Wales, which she visits with her mother, her stepfather, and his son. She forms a relationship with the Welsh housekeeper's son, Gwyn. They are outside, in the open Welsh countryside, and Alison tells Gwyn that he belongs to the place:

"Me? This is the first time I've seen the place –"

"That's it," said Alison. "You came a week ago, and you know everything as if you'd always lived here – while I've been spending holidays at the house all my life, and yet I don't belong. I'm as useless as one of those girls in fashion photographs – just stuck in a field of wheat, or a puddle, or on a mountain, and they look gorgeous but they don't know where they are. I'm like that. I don't belong."

(Garner 1967, 76)

According to Alison, Gwyn's background of growing up in a Welsh landscape makes him part of the mountainous landscape: this is where his identity lies, not hers. She belongs to the hedgerows, houses and cultivated garden-plots of middle-class England. Lyra Belacqua, the protagonist of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995), is another privileged English girl, of noble background. After spending some time on a boat with a group of Gyptians, who live in the fens in the South of an England in a parallel world, she likes to think she can become one of them. Taking on a Gyptian accent, she believes the water people could accept her as one of them, but Ma Costa, a Gyptian, brings her to her senses:

"You en't gyptian, Lyra. You might pass for gyptian with practice, but there's more to us than gyptian language. There's deeps in us and strong currents. We're water people all through, and you en't, you're a fire person."

(Pullman 1995, 113)

The Gyptians, borne and bred in a fen landscape, are shaped by that liquid landscape, but Lyra is part of Jordan college, its brick walls, tin roofs, underground vaults and age-old traditions. Likewise, the Lapland witches, although airborne for much of the time, belong to the barren tundra of the North, it is a large part of their identity. In *The Subtle Knife*, Philip Pullman's sequel to *Northern Lights*, one of the witches, Serafina Pekkala, has to go far away from her home while "every strand of moss, every icy puddle, every midge in her homeland thrilled against her nerves and called her back" (Pullman 1997, 49).

Numerous English children's books convey the message that people (or animals) should not try to change their native traits: what they are born and meant to do. In Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), the rabbits of the old warren come upon another group of rabbits and are planning to stay with them when they discover something "unnatural" about them. Blackberry says: "Those rabbits we left – Cowslip and the rest – a lot of the things they did weren't natural to rabbits – pushing stones into the earth and carrying food underground and Frith knows what" (Adams 1972, 112). The polar bears in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) are born to be bears, not men, and when their King, Iofur Raknison, builds a palace instead of their groves in the snow, they deteriorate: they dismiss their natural skills. Iorek Byrnison keeps all his bear qualities, because he does not try to be a man, and therefore he manages to win a fight with Iofur: "Iofur did not want to be a bear, he wanted to be a man; and Iorek was tricking him" (Pullman 1995, 353). One can actually never trick a bear, but Iofur has lost his innate traits by turning his back on his true identity as a polar animal.

Both Icelandic and English children's literature alludes to affinity with home and the home landscape, although the process is made by choice in Iceland and more by social forces in England. The ability to "see" or "read" landscape in different ways, making it part of a person's disposition, continues in the next section.

6.3. "Seeing" and "Reading" Landscapes

Growing up, we learn how to map out our environment, first from kitchen to bedroom, into the garden, across the street, and later, into wider surroundings, to a friend's house, to school, through the city, hills and valleys, mountains and rivers. The relationship we form with these places, the certainty of *knowing* them – where they are, what they are called – makes our identity. We perceive these landscapes in different ways, according to how they have been interpreted for us and stored in our memory. We are, as it were, "mapheads",

mapping the landscape we see in the brain. I quoted above from Lesley Howarth's *MapHead* (1995), which portrays a boy who can lie down on a landscape and absorb it, so that it becomes visible on his transparent, clean-shaved head. The landscapes we have absorbed are not that visible, but they have inevitably become part of our *paysage intérieur*. The "absorption" of landscape does not take place in a void: the "reading" of landscape is controlled by society, place and time.

In order to display how people are "taught" to look at a landscape in their society's accepted ways, I want to turn to an Icelandic children's book, Elias Snaeland Jonsson's *Brak og brestir* (1993). The objective is to portray the difference between landscapes outside the mind and landscapes inside the mind – and the interaction between the two. 15-year-old Hakon is travelling up on a glacier in a 4WD mountain jeep with his father and his uncle, Siggi. At the top of the glacier, while they are having a meal, Siggi interprets the landscape for his nephew, a landscape which is there, but cannot be seen because, at the end of winter it is still covered in snow: "Siggi continued reciting countless names of glaciers and mountains, hills and valleys, rivers and crags, most of which were hidden under their white winter covering. He knew them all like the alphabet" (Jonsson 1993, 60). Although it cannot be perceived through the eyes at the moment, the snow-covered landscape exists inside Siggi's mind. He has it intricately mapped out, and labelled with proper names in his mind's eye. By indicating to young Hakon where the glaciers and mountains, hills and valleys, rivers and crags are, and reciting their names, Siggi transfers the hidden image of the landscape in his mind to Hakon's mind, as this illustration shows:

This image has been removed for copyright reasons. It depicts a fisherman and a woman skiing, with a thought bubble showing a mountainous landscape above each character's head. There is an arrow from the landscape above the fisherman's head to the one above the skier's head.

Even though Hakon has not actually seen the landscape, he knows it is there under the layers of snow; he trusts Siggi's depiction of it and maps the landscape in his own mind for future use. Moments later, having finished his meal, he stands up and knows what he *ought to* see in the southeast and southwest:

Hakon stood up after his meal was finished and wondered at the greatness and the expanse of the land and its beauty, draped in its white coat. He remembered that on his left, in the southeast, he should detect Miklafell, and also that far away in the southwest, Peturshorn rose from the Langjokull-glacier.

(My transl., Jonsson 1993, 60-61)

Although not sure whether he can make out the shapes of the mountains that should be there – according to the map in his head – Hakon is certain they are there, and now knows them by name. The mountains that Siggi points out to Hakon are at the moment invisible (they may *always* be invisible), but Hakon is convinced he knows them under the snow. In the same way, we may for instance see boundaries all around us, which are invisible to those who have not been exposed to the same cultural interpretation as us.

In *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Simon Schama uses a work of art, a painting by René Magritte, to illustrate the idea of inner and outer landscapes. Schama says:

‘This is how we see the world,’ René Magritte argued in a 1938 lecture explaining his version of *La Condition humaine* [see next page] in which a painting has been superimposed over the view it depicts so that the two are continuous and indistinguishable. ‘We see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience on the inside.’ What lies beyond the windowpane of our apprehension, says Magritte, needs a design before we can properly discern its form, let alone derive pleasure from its perception. And it is

culture, convention, and cognition that makes that design; that invests a retinal impression with the quality we experience as beauty.
(Schama 1995, 12; quotes from Whitfield 1992, 62)

The map inside the mind corresponds to the map outside the mind, as Magritte's painting on the next page illustrates.

To further compound the idea, Denis Cosgrove observes in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*: "Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world" (Cosgrove 1984, 13).

"This image: René Magritte's *La Condition humaine* removed for copyright reasons."

René Magritte's *La Condition humaine*

Jonathan Smith compares reading landscape to reading a book, treating landscape as a text:

When we look at the social history of reading the landscape we see that taste has varied, much as taste in literature varies. Also, we see that much of the modern landscape, like much of modern literature, is not to the general reader's taste.
(Smith 1992, 76)

Different cultures have different ways of seeing the world. What a person from one culture considers beautiful may seem unattractive to another. This fact is exemplified in Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain* (1989), which is an adult's book, but I consider it important for illustrating the different ways of looking at landscape. Conway is an Australian, who had studied English literature for years when she got the chance to visit the blessed isle and encounter the landscapes depicted by English authors. Significantly, she did not recognize the landscape she had envisaged through the books she read:

The light was too misty, the air too filled with water. . . . It took a visit to England for me to understand how the Australian landscape actually formed the ground of my consciousness, shaped what I saw, and influenced the way a scene was organized in my mental imagery. I could teach myself through literature and painting to enjoy this landscape in England, but it would be the schooled response of the connoisseur, not the passionate response one has for the earth where one is born. My landscape was sparer, more brilliant in color, stronger in its contrasts, majestic in its scale, and bathed in shimmering light.

(Conway 1989, 198)

Conway had been consciously taught to appreciate English literature, but unconsciously taught by her culture to think of, and view, landscape on Australian terms.

The Icelanders are, like the Australians, used to the very brightness of the sun, and its play of light, as Gunnar, the young boy of Sigrun Davidsdottir's *Silfur Egils*, on a holiday in Paris notices: "The greyish sun shone on the pavement. At home the sun was a proper sun, bright and shining, but not here. It was partly shut out by the carpet of heat" (Davidsdottir 1989, 9). Gunnar, the Icelandic, cannot appreciate the beauty of Paris, as Conway, the Australian, could not recognize the splendour of the English landscape. In the same way, the vast expanses and deserts of Australia might seem too barren and devoid of lush trees to fit the English aesthetic taste, and the intensity of the sun in Iceland might make natural outlines too sharp for a Frenchman to value the country's somewhat harsh geography. David Lowenthal and Hugh C. Prince point out: "People in any country see their terrain through preferred and accustomed spectacles, and tend to make it over as they see it" (Lowenthal and Prince 1965).

Barry Lopez' travels around the world have opened up his eyes to the mysterious connection between man and landscape, and he comments that "to inquire into the intricacies of an unknown landscape is to provoke thoughts about one's own interior landscape, and the familiar landscapes of memory" (Lopez 1986, 247). For example, when William, the boy from the country in Leon Garfield's *John Diamond* comes to the city of London, he uses his landscape of memory to define the "new" landscape of a million chimneys:

I saw, with a kind of shock, an immense dark mountain heaving up over the town and sitting in the sky.

It was the dome of St Paul's Cathedral; and I had never seen anything so huge.

(Garfield, 1980, 70)

William is only familiar with mountains, not big buildings, so he associates the dome with this recognizable concept. In a similar way, a children's book writer will, in the process of writing about an "unknown" landscape, unconsciously dig into his or her interior landscape to invoke images to use as a setting for the story. A "real" landscape has been stored in the mind, filtered through layers of myth and memory, and then transferred onto the written page. Memory and landscape are strongly interconnected; a vision of landscape is always mediated through human experience. Simon Schama points out in *Landscape and Memory*:

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

(Schama 1995, 6-7)

Landscape tastes are thus shaped by memory, and we use the layers of memory, the maps in our mind, to observe a "new" landscape. In order to demonstrate how the past shapes our view of the present, Raymond Williams points to Wordsworth's *Prelude* and the part called "Residence in London", which has new ways of seeing the city. "Wordsworth sees the city with his country experiences behind him and shaping his vision" (Williams 1985, 149). The boy in Dora Stefansdottir's *Breidholtsstrakur fer i sveit* ("A Suburban Boy in the Country" 1985), has a comparable experience. After having spent his summer in the

country, he returns by bus and travels from the bus station through the city in a taxi with his mother. He sees the city in a new light, including Breidholt, his neighbourhood:

Breidholt was even greyer than the city centre. Still everything was the same as it was before. The view from the windows had not changed. But after having watched green grass, a flowing river and blue mountains for a whole summer, these grey houses seemed gloomier and colder than before, Palli thought. Water leaked from the roofs and gathered into pools on the pavement.

(My transl., Stefansdottir 1985, 154-5)

Every new experience adds a new layer to memory, thus influencing the way one “reads” the landscape. Advertisements and the media have tremendous influence on modern children. Ormur, the protagonist of Olafur H. Simonarsson’s *Gauragangur* (“All Hell Loose” 1988), feels his views guided by advertisements and the media, as discussed in Chapter 4. He goes to his girlfriend’s cabin after Christmas to meet her:

First we saw a trace of Indian smoke trailing up into the sky, which was radiantly blue, as if placed there by Icelandair’s marketing department. The bush was swathed in snow, which was whiter than the sheets in Buckingham Palace. And there was the cabin, submerged between the snow banks. It rested in a typical Icelandic hollow by a lake.

(My transl., Simonarson 1988, 175-6)

The influence of the media on Ormur’s impression of the environment is enormous. He “reads” the landscape through glasses provided by the media and the consumer culture he lives in: he has, indeed, lost his “innocence”. James and Nancy Duncan point to Roland Barthes’s notions about such implications:

Through Barthes’s eyes one sees the world exposed and demystified; one’s ‘natural attitude’ towards the environment is shattered as the apparent innocence of landscapes is shown to have profound ideological implications.

(Duncan and Duncan 1992, 18)

Because landscapes have been interpreted for children, their young eyes, looking at the landscape in front of them, are no longer “innocent”: they are wearing the lenses provided by their culture. The next two sections review examples of how ideological implications have been superimposed on landscapes in English and Icelandic children’s books. I have selected the most noticeable landscape inferences in either culture to discuss: England’s class-related, boundary-marked landscapes and Iceland’s “living”, elf-populated, troll-occupied landscapes.

6.4. Class and English Landscape

Having discussed the “reading” of landscape in the last section, here I move towards a more culture-specific reading: to how authors of English children’s books look at landscape. To carry on with the “reading” metaphor, Jonathan Smith claims that people’s reading habits, that is general reading habits, have changed. We used to read with a lot of time on our hands, not disturbed, but now people read while waiting for an airplane, in toilet stalls, and in marginal scraps of time:

Outwardly, this shift in the priority of reading in the literal sense is paralleled by a shift in the metaphorical reading of landscape. Gardens, which in this metaphor are the counterpart of the library, have become a functional ensemble of recreational spaces and vegetable patches yielding satisfactions equivalent to those found on a shelf of self-help and how-to books. When this is not the case, they are called (in the United States) yards, and they are nothing but an economical reference to a dwindling pastoral tradition, which are preserved and left unread for the same obscure reason that the Harvard Five Foot Shelf of books is preserved but left unread.

(Smith 1992, 77)

Smith says that the English Romantic poets spent a lot of time in nature, but these days we cannot allow ourselves to spend that amount of time in “reading” landscape. We make, as Smith points out, little samples of nature in our front garden or backyard and consider these, like town parks, as being “landscape”. The humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan discusses the definition of what we call a *natural environment*:

People still regard some man-made landscapes as natural because they look harmonious. The suburb, with its lawns and curved streets, looks natural—at least in comparison with the inner city. Farm lands are ‘natural,’ although they are clearly humanized landscapes.

(Tuan 1978A, 7)

It is difficult for children to tell whether a landscape is “natural” or man-made. Most landscapes in England are, in fact, man-made in one way or the other, and English children have learnt to appreciate some landscapes for their (man-made) beauty and ignore others for their unattractiveness. Brian Graham accentuates the belief that looking at landscape can be taught and claims that “manipulated depictions of landscape offer an ordered, simplified vision of the world” (Graham 1998B, 21).

The history of man's interaction with landscape has an enormous influence on the way a child is "taught" to look at landscape, as is obvious in Berlie Doherty's *Granny was a Buffer Girl* (1986). Young Jess has learnt to "see" the landscape through her parents:

If you climb up from our house and stand up on the Bole Hills you feel as if you could touch the moors with one hand and the heart of the city with the other, you're that close to both. From our street at night you can see a line of lights going up the hill and reach over Stannington, and you know that's a limb of the city, but below those lights it's dark and quiet with the secrets of the Rivelin Valley, with its hood of trees and the gleam of its dams threading out towards Ladybower and the hills of Derbyshire.

When I was a little girl my dad used to take me down Rivelin and tell me about the trolls that lived under the bridges and made the stepping-stones for little people to cross the river by, and I was half-afraid of them. My mother used to take me down and show me the remains of the old water-mills that have all been pulled down now.

(Doherty 1986, 104)

Rivelin valley seems "dark and quiet" because of the secrets it guards, the tales and legends kept there. Jess' father interprets the landscape in one way, because he wants his little girl to be careful when crossing the river, and her mother in another way, because she reminisces about the old watermills that used to be there and provide her forefathers with work. Jess learns to see the landscape from yet one point of view when her grandfather interprets it for her:

At the Sheffield end of the canal the water's as yellow as dandelions; I suppose that's with all the rust and chemicals. All the reeds are crusted with yellow and where they've been cast up on to the bank they look like long strands of rusty wire. Grandad says if I fell in the canal there I'd come out galvanised, and I believe him. There's an odd smell, too, like ammonia and pig farms. Nearly all the works along the canal-side are closed down; industrial monuments, my grandad calls them, great corrugated iron shells with pigeons fluttering in and out of tiny high windows. It's a lovely place, for all that.

(Doherty 1986, 95-6)

Grandad's interpretation of the landscape for Jess is tainted with his caring for the young girl – he warns her not to fall in the canal by saying she would come out "galvanised" – and, very heavily, his nostalgia for the golden days of the steel industry, "when all the mills would be working and there'd be the throb of machines and a constant clanging and clattering along the wharves, and barges would be busy on the water" (Doherty 1986, 96). Although the water is yellow from chemicals and the corrugated iron is nothing but rusty

ruins, Jess comments that it is “a lovely place” – because it has been interpreted for her as lovely by her grandfather.

Obviously, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What we conceive of as “beautiful landscape” is what our culture considers a beautiful landscape. Even the term “landscape” is loaded with connotations, as Bob Trubshaw suggests:

The word “landscape” originated as a terminology of painters. In essence, the landscape of the gentry – still our landscape – is seen from a “viewpoint”, in perspective. It manifested in a style of art which depicted the world as realistically as possible – ultimately arriving at the photographic image, which (in both still and moving formats) now ubiquitously pervades our culture.

(Trubshaw 2001)

The fact that English landscape is seen from the perspective of the gentry, who do not have to work on the land but admire it from a certain viewpoint is also highlighted by Denis E. Cosgrove, who claims: “To speak of landscape beauty or quality is to adopt the role of observer rather than participant” (Cosgrove 1984, 18).

Landscape tastes in England have predominantly been formed by the upper classes, and these are the prevalent discriminating factors: aesthetic landscape/working landscape, enclosures/open spaces, tamed landscape/wild landscape, organised woodland/wild forests and cultivated vegetation/weeds. The English have, since the 18th century, grown to prefer the former over the latter, associating the former with beauty, affluence, tranquillity, rest and order, and the latter with ugliness, sloth and poverty. These tastes are reflected in contemporary English children’s books, especially those that project ideals through animal figures and in fantasy literature.

The tension between an aesthetic landscape and a working landscape dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries, first because of the “enclosures” and then the industrial revolution.¹⁴ The Enclosure Acts of the 18th century were a change from “inclusive” community

ownership to “exclusive” individual rights of property. Since then, English landscape tastes have been habitually interlocked with the landscape’s functional value for the culture, and their development during the last two centuries in England has relied, in many ways, on capitalism. Industrialisation in the 18th century led to an original division of what had been merely landscape (or the English people’s environment), into what Raymond Williams has termed “the working landscape,” providing people with work and sustenance, and an aesthetic landscape, designed to please the eyes of those who could afford to sit back and enjoy it. By and by, as urbanization increased, and England’s industrial cities developed, the term “countryside” came into the English language as a binary opposition to the monster cityscapes of, for instance, London, Manchester and Liverpool. Michael Bunce suggests that countryside “is a culturally constructed term. It is also very much an English term which reflects a peculiarly national obsession with the countryside as an aesthetic and a social ideal” (Bunce 1994, 3). The fact that the term “countryside” generally refers, in England, to an agriculturally enclosed, domesticated landscape, is important for my discussion on landscape tastes, both here and in the next chapter. So, too, is the culturally specific interconnection between class and landscape, which also depends on boundaries – and the use of woodland.

The functional use of woodland, dating back to the eighteenth century, has affected English landscape tastes, as Stephen Daniels points out: “The most agreeable woodland was that tidily planted or securely partitioned on landed estates. Here trees confirmed the power of property” (Daniels 1988, 44). Neatly planted trees confirmed ownership, pleased the symmetrical eye and provided an excellent view of the property. Landowners also put trees in their service to construct distinct boundaries between their land and “wild” land, between them and the indigenous public:

¹⁴ “Enclosures” refer to the appropriation of common land as private property in Britain, or the changing of open-field systems to enclosed fields, often used for sheep. The enclosures peaked in the period from about 1760 to 1820.

[M]indful of the continuing association of forests with lawlessness, connoisseurs of woodland were usually careful to distinguish areas which were effectively appropriated and managed from those which were not.

(Daniels 1988, 44)

Hence, woodland that had not been “tamed” became linked with criminals: poachers, foresters and other outlaws, who could not be reached by the arms of the law; well-arranged land came to represent social order and wild woodland symbolised social disorder. Charles Vancouver, a reporter on the New Forest to the Board of Agriculture in 1813, called areas resistant to the improving imagination, a “nest and conservatory of sloth, idleness and misery” (Vancouver 1813, 496).

Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) casts animal characters to demonstrate its theme of “good” and “bad” characters and places, reflecting these approaches. On Mole and Water Rat’s well-organised river-bank everything is “happy, and progressive, and occupied” (Grahame 1908, 2). Their upper-class friend, Toad, lives in Toad Hall, with a “Private” sign at the front, sanctioning his ownership. The river bankers do not go into the hostile Wild Wood, as Rat explains to Mole, because a different class of animals live there:

“Weasels - and stoats - and foxes - and so on. They’re all right in a way - I’m very good friends with them - pass the time of day when we meet, and all that - but they break out sometimes, there’s no denying it, and then - well, you can’t really trust them, and that’s the fact.”

(Grahame 1908, 6)

The danger of upheaval in the “bad” area is not enough to scare Mole – he is fascinated by the Wild Wood, in spite of its seeming to him “low and threatening, like a black reef in some still southern sea” and he has to go there (Grahame 1908, 25). The blackness of the Wild Wood is what Mole fears most and he feels better when the snow turns it into a more familiar, white form.

The boundaries between the good and the bad neighbourhood, white and black, clean and defiled, have thus been blurred by the snow, enabling Mole and Rat to spend the night in the bad wood with Badger — who does not care about Society at all. When Rat and Mole leave the Wild Wood, they feel a sense of relief:

Rocks and brambles and tree-roots behind them, confusedly heaped and tangled; in front, a great space of quiet fields, hemmed by lines of hedges black on the snow, and, far ahead, a glint of the familiar old river. . . . Pausing there a moment and looking back, they saw the whole mass of the Wild Wood, dense, menacing, compact, grimly set in vast white surroundings.

(Grahame 1908, 44-45)

Animals in the Wild Wood, then, are closer to Nature in the rough than civilised creatures like Mole, and presumably not as advanced as the river-bank breed. They certainly prove their bestiality when they squat in Toad Hall, “Toad’s ancestral home” (143). Settled there, they – in striking contrast to proficient river-bankers – prove their idleness and sloth: “Lying in bed half the day, and breakfast at all hours, and the place in such a mess . . . it’s not fit to be seen” (127). The animals of the Wild Wood, as Otter puts it, “mayn’t be blessed with brains” (40), but they learn the lesson taught to them by the middle-class river-bankers. After successfully subjugating the rioters by making them serve their superiors and clean Toad’s mansion (a proper occupation for working-class folks), Mole and Rat could safely “take a stroll together in the Wild Wood, now successfully tamed so far as they were concerned; and it was pleasing to see how respectfully they were greeted by the inhabitants” (Grahame 1908, 149).

In his comparison between *Wind in the Willows* and Frank L. Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Tony Watkins notes the class implications in the former, that “home” is “their place in society”, which is more flexible in the latter (Watkins 1992, 185). Watkins claims that the two books

represent very different responses to the social changes common to both countries at that time: in particular, the development of industrialization and technology and the associated changes in the relations between social classes. Yet it is perhaps because the novels may be regarded as responses to specific historical circumstances that the myths of national identity are so strongly woven into them.

(Watkins 1992, 186)

Comparing the same two books, Timothy E. Cook talks about how the English story warns about the Wide World beyond the Wild Wood:

Part of this emphasis may be linked to the British preoccupation with private property (see Adelson 1971), which is given a near-mystical hold over Grahame’s animals. But it is also symptomatic of a foreordained order around which social expectations are built and on which security is founded.

Written almost eighty years after *The Wind in the Willows*, W. J. Corbett's *The Song of Pentecost* (1982) also employs animal figures to represent polarised social classes. It tells the story of a group of harvest mice who get driven from their peaceful home on the outskirts of a city in the British Midlands because "the City spilled over" (Corbett 1982, 12). The mice have a very carefully organised community — family values are important and everyone conforms to the set laws of their society. To them, like the river-bankers, work is virtue and sloth is vice, and the slogan "Busyness is next to Godliness" is rigorously upheld (Corbett 1982, 26). On their way to a chosen destination in the Lickey Hills, the harvest mice have to go through a "wild" forest, where a different set of mice reign:

The Ruffians were a band of renegade mice, who roamed the countryside in search of excitement and battle. They were Townie mice, who had been uprooted by the City's spill-over, and now ran wild over this part of the world. Their hard City training made them more than a match for most creatures who crossed their violent path, although they drew the line at foxes. . . . Their watchwords were destruction, thievery and death.

(Corbett 1982, 95-96)

Showing great moral strength and valour the harvest mice manage to get through the forest of the Ruffians, with some minor accountable losses. The stability of their society was for a moment ruffled by the hoodlums, but it is restored – stronger for the experience, because the fear of moral panic pushes them closer together.

Like *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Song of Pentecost*, Alan Garner's novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), elaborates the division of "bad" woods and "good" woods quite distinctly, mainly through the two main characters, a middle-class brother and sister, Colin and Susan. Early in the story, the children go into a beech wood, where all is still, no grass is on the ground, "winter seemed to linger there among the grey, green beeches. When the children came out of such a wood it was like coming into a beautiful garden from a musty cellar" (Garner 1960, 23). Later on, when the children are in the company of a Cheshire farmer called Gowther and two dwarfs, and are being chased by "the morthbrood", a gang of small, men-like creatures, they have to go through a wild

wood with “tough, crooked boughs, inches across, stemming to long, pliant, wire-like shoots” and “skeins of dead branches which snapped at a touch, forming lancets of wood to goad and score the flesh” (Garner 1960, 165). Coming out of the dense, wild wood, the group crosses a field and finds itself in a very different kind of a forest:

The trees left the road almost at right angles and continued across the fields as what Gowther called Dumville’s plantation. For most of its length it was very narrow, only a matter of feet in places, but it gave splendid cover from the air. After half a mile the wood swung right and headed south once more: it curved over the brow of a low hill, and from there a good view of the surrounding country was obtained.

“It’s *well-wooded*, at any rate,” said Susan.

(Garner 1960, 172; my emphasis)

The plantation protects the children more efficiently from the pagan, wolf-like beasts than the wild wood. They have now entered a place where they are totally in control, in a piece of man-made, efficiently organised, “well-wooded” landscape – constructed to provide an excellent view of the surrounding property. Leaving this plantation, Susan and her friends move on to another one:

From the larches they crossed a small area of scrub to a plantation of firs—specimens of Gowther’s despised “trees on parade.” But these trees were *well grown*, there were few low branches, and the rows were generously spaced, so that, instead of a cheek-whipping barrier, the trees spread away in a colonnade of, for once, pleasing symmetry. The thickly needled floor was mute: no sun cut through the green roof: here twilight lay hidden at noon.

(Garner 1960, 175-6; my emphasis)

Gowther, a common farmer who works on the land, despises the neat rows of trees, but middle-class Susan and Colin appreciate its advantages: the “pleasing symmetry” designed for their visionary delight; the floor and the roof that effectively provide silence and shelter for their convenience. Susan and Colin believe in the functional significance of “nature” and a fixed division of woodland into “good” and “bad” areas, depending on the measure of man’s intervention (and the value of his assets).

The English have for a long time believed that it is good for city people to go to the country at weekends, or on their holiday, to get in touch with nature – but it takes an educated mind to truly appreciate the countryside. Patrick Wright refers to the words of Harry Batsford in the “Introductory Note” to *How to See the Country* in 1940:

It is hoped that all these migrations will render it possible for all but the hopeless urbanites to learn to “see” the country – to get to understand, appreciate and realise something of the message of its outward aspect, its changing seasons, its people and their life and work . . . No-one is a true Englishman, or has lived a fully balanced life, if the country has played no part in his development.

(Batsford 1940, 3; Wright 1985, 64)

Wright adds that although Batsford does not state so directly, the urban working class has very often been demeaned for its “uneducated” relationship to the countryside:

Here are people who break fences and leave litter, who play radios and shout while others are trying to commune with nature, who pick the wild flowers (even the threatened orchid) rather than appreciating them in their natural habitat, who frequent tea-shacks and lack stout shoes.

(Wright 1985, 64)

The privileged people have a tie to the countryside; one must have had the right experiences to truly be of the right spirit. “People of an upper middle-class formation can recognise not just their own totems and togetherness in these essential experiences, but also the philistinism of the urban working class as its [sic] stumbles out, blind and unknowing, into the countryside at weekends” (Wright 1985, 86). This view is reflected in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (Garner 1960). When Colin and Susan have started school, their visits to the Edge become rarer:

Sometimes at the week-end they would go there, but then the woods were peopled with townsfolk who, shouting and crashing through the undergrowth, and littering the ground with food wrappings and empty bottles, completely destroyed the atmosphere of the place. . . . Nothing remained. This place, where beauty and terror had been as opposite sides of the same coin, was now a playground of noise. Its spirit was dead – or hidden.

(Garner 1960, 77)

Colin and Susan can no longer enjoy the beauty of the place because it has been “destroyed” by hopeless urbanites, who do not know how to “read” the landscape.

The affluent English have enough money to own country houses where they can enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, whether in England, Scotland or Wales. Gwyn in Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* asks: “Who’s going to rent to us when stuffed shirts from Birmingham pay eight quid a week so they can swank about their cottage in Wales?” (Garner 1967, 52). The country house, as Patrick Wright suggests, “combines its own ‘historic interest’ with the ‘natural beauty’ of what are actually heavily landscaped and

aestheticized surroundings” (Wright 1985, 55). “Good” English countryside is one which has been manipulated by the human hand (or bulldozers) in order to weed out what has been deemed unpleasant or valueless by the culture, and then symmetrically re-arranged to serve a function while pleasing the eye of the observer. As Denis Cosgrove puts it, “landscape is a *social* product, the consequence of a collective human transformation of nature” (Cosgrove 1984, 14).

Industrialisation in the nineteenth century brought a new dimension to English landscape, and a growth of large industrial cities, e.g. London and Birmingham. These cities gradually followed the ideological pattern set by landowners in the eighteenth century. The middle and upper classes wanted to set themselves off from the working-class by locating themselves in suburbs or clearly defined areas of the city, where they would feel safely guarded against the (imagined) threat of the poor. Their well-organised social space, with parks and green patches, parallels tidily planted and securely partitioned, “good” woodland in rural areas. Contrasted to this image, city slums, or “bad” neighbourhoods, became analogous to the wild woodland, wherein hoodlums and ruffians wander. Again, there are boundaries, and in this case, between the affluent and poor inhabitants of the city. I have already in the first section of this chapter discussed how English children’s books writers tend to associate “slum children” with animal qualities, such as the slyness of the fox or the territorial instinct of the wolf. This discussion continues here, associated with boundaries in the city and the division into good and bad areas.

The inner city (or “slum”) has taken over the role of the wild forest in representing a place where evil lurks, as a number of children’s books show, metaphorically or directly. These include John Rowe Townsend’s *Gumble’s Yard* (1961), Bernard Ashley’s *A Kind of Wild Justice* (1978), Leon Garfield’s *John Diamond* (1980), and Gillian Cross’ post-modern novel, *Wolf* (1990). The main characters in John Rowe Townsend’s *Gumble’s Yard* (1961) live in the “Jungle”, so-called because the streets are named after tropical flowers, but the

association with an untamed forest is also notable. The children have lost their parents and are staying with their uncle Walter and his girlfriend, but the couple moves away unexpectedly, leaving Sandra (12) and Kevin (13) alone in the house, along with Walter's young children. To escape interference from the authorities, Sandra and Kevin move to Gumble's Yard, a row of empty cottages by the canal — a place in which, it seems, only the fittest survive. They live there by the laws of the jungle and take on half-man, half-animal qualities, as Kevin comments: "We helped Sandra to come down through the trap. She was grouching a bit, and muttering something about having to be a family of Tarzans" (Townsend 1961, 30). Leon Garfield's *John Diamond* (1980) transfers the paragon of "good" and "bad" woods onto cityscape by definitely associating slum inhabitants with animals of the wild wood. Set in Hogarthian England, it tells the story of William Jones, a 12-year-old boy who goes to London to try to right the wrongs of his father's past. A gang of boys attack the house where he resides in the inner city, but the inhabitants have a way of protecting themselves:

"Boarders! Boarders!" shrieked the women; and I saw, coming out from between the slits and cracks that intersected the crowding tenements, as if they were falling apart at the seams, a grim and menacing pack of ruffians, with murder in their eyes.

There was something about them, and the awful darkness from which they emerged, that strongly suggested wolves and bears coming out of a forest. Although they seemed to be armed with nothing worse than fists, I felt that they had sharp claws and even sharper teeth.

(Garfield 1980 72)

Garfield literally associates slum boys with wolves of the forest, and yet these boys protect William, because he is an accepted guest of their territory. One of this slum breed, a red-haired boy, who is "like a wild and savage animal; a largish rat" (Garfield 1980, 82), eventually becomes William's good friend. At the end of the story, when this boy comes to William's home in the country, he has turned into a rural animal, being "like a large hedgehog, with a strong suggestion of spikes and fleas" (Garfield 1980, 177). He has moved to the country, but his animal qualities still abide.

Ronnie Webster, the protagonist of *A Kind of Wild Justice* (Ashley 1978), lives in Shepherd's Gate. Without being able to read the signs, he knows his house by animal

instinct (discussed earlier) and he moves like an animal, too, running “like a fox with the hounds at his tail” (175). Ronnie’s existence is constantly threatened by Roy Bradshaw, who reminds Ronnie of “some caged wolf” (115). Charlie, Ronnie’s surrogate grandfather, suffers from Bradshaw’s threats “like a big animal in pain, a creature that was powerless to help itself” (Ashley 1978, 128). Ronnie’s mother assists in framing his father, who is consequently arrested and jailed. She leaves the boy to take care of himself in this neighbourhood, where, like Charlie claims, “the law of the jungle” persists (128). When the trouble is over, detective Jones provides an alternative, outside view of Shepherd’s Gate’s inmates by saying: “They call revenge ‘a kind of wild justice,’ which the law ought to be weeding out” (Ashley 1978, 179).

The division between a “slum” where immigrants live, and a respectable neighbourhood is also portrayed in *A Kind of Wild Justice* (Ashley 1978), seen through the eyes of Ronnie’s shcoolmate, Manjit Mirza:

The High Street, separating Manjit’s home neighbourhood from her school’s, was as wide as the Indian Ocean, and her culture was as out of place around her school as a Jamaican’s might have been around Clive Road. She had soon discovered that two streets in East London can be worlds apart, a discovery her parents and her elder brother had made before her, each in their turn; and she knew that to hang around after school was to be laughed at, or abused, or sometimes hit.

(Ashley 1978, 40)

The divide between Manjit’s neighbourhood and a “better” area is deep, but invisible, and the girl has learnt at a young age to “see” the boundaries.

Cassy Phelan, the 13-year-old protagonist of Gillian Cross’ *Wolf* (1990), finds herself in a “wild forest landscape” — both in her fractured reality and in her recurring dreams. Sent away by her Nan, she goes to look for her mother and finds herself in a dingy neighbourhood with “boarded-up windows and the tangled gardens full of rubbish” (11).

Standing in the garden of the house in which her mother has squatted with Lyall, her black boyfriend, and Lyall's son, she feels no sense of belonging:

It smelt of damp earth and rotting leaves, as if she had strayed out of London into a wilder place. When a lighted bus rumbled across the top of Albert Street, it seemed to be moving in another world.

(Cross 1990, 13)

Having entered the house, Cassy walks into the back room commenting to herself: "It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies" (14). She enters this forest with her hood up and a bag of food in her hand, seeing Lyall for the first time:

Not a boyfriend at all, but a man of fifty or more, with a lined, black face and a fringe of grizzled beard. Bony ankles and bare, long-toed feet. Long, long fingers, spread suddenly wide as he smiled at her out of the dark forest.

"Hallo, Little Red Riding Hood."

For a moment she could not take her eyes off him. His narrow lips were taut round the dark cave of his mouth and his body was as taut as a hunting animal's, in the moment before it springs. He was waiting for some answer that she did not know how to give.

(Cross 1990, 15)

Lyall is unquestionably wolf-like, and Cassy represents Little Red Riding Hood, threatened by the wolf and his "dark forest" surroundings.

Obviously, these books about children living in slums emerged as a result of the collapse of Britain's economy in the 1960s and 70s, which caused a loss of employment and had a deep impact on the inner areas of the country's largest cities. The Inner Urban Areas Act of 1978 made a considerable difference, so that now sewage problems hardly exist and the streets are cleaned of litter regularly. Surveys show that the crime rate is not much higher in "slums" than in other parts of the city. The image, however, tends to linger. David Sibley holds that a suburban society's concern with order, conformity and social homogeneity, needs deviance, an outside threat, because "it brings into being a morally superior condition" (Sibley 1995B, 39). Sibley reflects on the reporting of street crime in the 1970s and the inner city riots in the 1980s, saying that these confirmed the boundaries between the "respectable white suburbs" and "black inner areas" (43). "The myth," Sibley claims, "is more important than the reality" (Sibley 1995B, 42). This myth is still sustained in children's books by the association of slums with wild forests and their

inhabitants with mean animals; the reputation remains, the boundaries are forever hard to cross. Manjit Mirza realises that “whatever happened, for people like her in Shepherds Gate there would always be a separateness around them” (Ashley 1978, 182).

The English concept of landscape is thoroughly intermingled with ideas on social class, privileges, and boundaries. However hard I looked in the Icelandic children’s book selection for some parallel notions, I could not find them: no “organised woodland”, no “slums”, no allusion to small animals or territorial instincts. Icelandic landscape preferences are of a different kind, as the next section illustrates.

6.5. The Living Landscapes of Iceland

Whereas English landscape tastes go primarily for the functional, the Icelandic landscape tastes go primarily for the wild. These landscape tastes may derive from the fact only around 23 percent of Iceland is cultivated, leaving over three quarters of it in “wilderness” (Icelandic Agriculture 2000). An apparently “peaceful” expanse of land in Iceland can crack open in a powerful earthquake at any minute. Steep mountains towering above a village provide shelter from cruel storms, but they can also produce avalanches that turn each house in the village to mere crumble. A volcano which has been “sleeping” for centuries can erupt one morning, leaving large areas practically uninhabitable. In this landscape, it is no wonder that the native people have assigned some secret life to the landscape. There had to be some unseen powers behind such unpredictability, such cruelty. In Iceland, man tries to pacify nature, live with it, take it in stride. John Moeller states that when people have to live in a landscape which opposes their aims and expectations, they cannot be rational:

Specifically, the arid and spacious environment is overwhelming, so that one can be at peace with that environment only by nurturing one’s nonrational characteristics.

(Moeller 1988, 21)

As an example, Moeller takes a story about three brothers, one of which is Harold, who use different ways to fight a cat. “Only Harold takes nature on its own terms, balancing

the rational and nonrational, and only Harold survives the battle with the cat” (*ibid*). The Icelanders have, likewise, used their nonrational characteristics to deal with nature throughout the centuries. They have learnt to “see” landscapes as a living entity, densely populated with living creatures, elves and huldurfolk.¹⁵ A study conducted in 1998 by DV, an Icelandic newspaper, shows that that the belief is still strong. DV asked a number of participants: “Do you believe in elves?” Positive replies were 54.4% and negative 45.6%, and these came not from children, but grown-ups (DV 22 July 1998).

I have noted during my stay in England that most English people I have spoken to find this very funny, to believe that *elves* exist! Arni Bjornsson, a noted Icelandic ethnologist and author of several books on ethnology and culture, seems tired of constantly having to answer for the Icelanders’ belief in the supernatural on international ground, claiming: “I have repeatedly had to ask myself if I am telling the truth or if I should generally tell the truth about these matters” (Bjornsson 1996, 79). Erlendur Haraldsson quotes Bjornsson, saying that perhaps there is no reason to justify the Icelanders’ strong folk belief. He claims that if an international survey were conducted concerning such beliefs, it would show that the Icelandic’s belief in the supernatural is not “funny” at all. Quoting an international study which surveyed spiritual experiences of around 18,000 people randomly selected in Western Europe and the United States, Haraldsson points to the fact that 60% of Americans and Italians admit they have undergone some kind of a spiritual experience, whereas the Icelanders scored 52%, the British 44% – and the Norwegians a mere 24%.¹⁶ According to these statistics, the people who believe in some kind of spirits

¹⁵ The belief in huldurfolk (the hidden people) goes a long way back in Icelandic folk belief. The story goes that God called Adam and Eve and wanted to see their children. Some of them were dirty and not presentable, so Adam and Eve were ashamed and hid them. This made God angry, so He decided that their descendants should forever be hidden from human eyes.

¹⁶ The “spiritual experience” included telepathy, visionary experiences or communication with the dead. Haraldsson points out that books were published on the results of the study in Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain, but none of these included the replies to this particular question. Haraldsson suggests that their writers, like Bjornsson, had perhaps considered if they should at all mention these amazing statistics, and came to a negative decision. Erlendur Haraldsson, “Islensk Thjodtru Og Dultru I Althjodlegum Samanburdi” (“Icelandic Folk Belief and the Supernatural in an International Comparison”, *Skirnismal* 173 (1999). page 184. The British book on the results is Stephen Harding, David Phillips, and Michael Fogarty, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe: Unity, Diversity and Change* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

amount to nearly half of the British people (a figure in which the Irish probably have a larger share than the English) and more than half of the Icelandic nation. The form that unseen spirits could take in the eyes of the Icelanders are both those of dead people *and* a living, very slightly different kind of people in a somewhat parallel world. I venture to guess that the English would, on the other hand, generally restrict unseen spirits to the presence of the dead amongst us.

Icelandic children are “taught” to see Iceland’s landscapes as unpredictable, and “living”, that is populated with elves, trolls and huldurfolk, the unseen people. The unpredictability of landscape is detectable in, for instance, Gudlaug Richter’s *Jora og eg* (1988). The storyteller, a young girl, goes with her father to see the eruption of Mt. Hekla, one of Iceland’s most active volcanoes:

Then we saw fire flaming up and a black gush of lava came spitting out of [the mountain]. Next there was this huge explosion, the mountain literally burst open and a black fountain was turned on. This was incredible. I admit that. The greatest thing was to see the lava come streaming down the sides of the mountain like whipped cream, coloured red and orange.

(My transl., Richter 1988, 9)

The young modern-day girl in Richter’s book finds out that a huge Hekla eruption in 1104 had destroyed the home of a girl whose story she gets interested in, killing hundreds of people and livestock. Volcanic eruptions are, for Icelandic children, a fact of life, accepted and taken in their stride. Icelanders also have to suffer earthquakes, which are quite frequent in certain parts of the country. They have become such a fixed reality in the mind of Icelanders that they even occur in a fantasy world, for example the world created by Heidur Baldursdottir in *Alagadalurinn* (1989), the story of two sisters that accidentally step into a secondary world. On their travel through that world, the earth starts shaking:

Suddenly the earth began quivering. All went dark and the earth under their feet groaned. The shaking increased until everything was wobbling. The trees shook and swayed back and forth. On the other side of the spring a tree was torn out of the ground with its roots, then another, and a third. Huge boulders appeared out of the ground, crags opened, the water in the spring turned pitch black and sunk down.

(My transl., Baldursdottir 1989, 36)

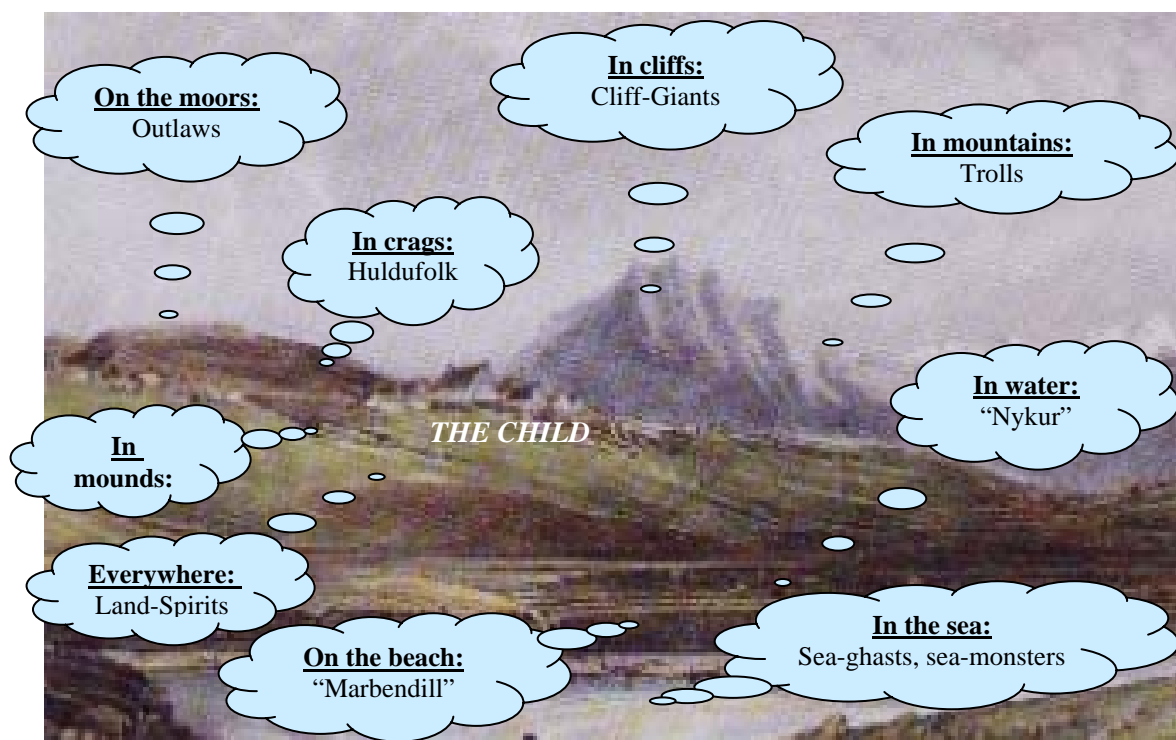
An unpredictable landscape is so entrenched in the Icelandic mind that, much like the polluted image of London in *Northern Lights* (Pullman 1995), it is imposed upon a secondary world.

Stories about living entities in the landscape originate in the sagas and Icelandic folktales. In the Prologue to his *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) says that in the beginning of religious practices, men wondered at the association between men and animals and the earth, which they saw confirmed in many ways. One was that water runs both high up in the mountains and in low valleys; animals and birds have blood flowing in both the head and feet. Another was that each year grass and flowers grow on the ground, which wither and die within the year; the same occurs in animals and birds, who grow hair and feathers that fall off within the year. Yet another was that when the earth is opened, e.g. dug into, grass would eventually grow in the wound; this also applies to animals and birds, their wounds will heal in due course. Sturluson also pointed out that boulders and rocks in the earth correlate to teeth and bones in animals and birds (as summarized in Briem 1991). The earth itself, according to Norse mythology is alive, old, powerful: it produces all living beings and reclaims everything that dies. People thought there must be some unexplainable power in control of all this, the sun, the rain and the wind. Thus, the Norse gods sprung to life: Odin, Thor, Freia, etc. Earth itself was populated with creatures: elves, dwarfs and giants.

Because almost all of what we know about Norse mythology was written by Icelanders (in *Edda* and *Snorra-Edda*), the landscapes of Iceland tend to be associated with the Norse gods. Whereas Greek mythology embraces the light, the clear sky and olive groves of Greece, and Christian myth entails the deserts and lakes of Israel, Norse mythology belongs to the turbulent seas and grim environment of the North. This association is exemplified in a book by German writer Walter Hansen called *Asgard: Entdeckungsfahrt in die Germanische Götterwelt* (Hansen 1986), in which Hansen associates photographs of lava stretches and mysterious-looking mountain with stories about the Norse gods.

After the Icelanders converted to Christianity in AD 1000, the Norse myths by no means fell into obscurity, as *Snorra-Edda*, written more than two centuries later, bears witness to. Supernatural beings, which originated in Norse myth, lived on in the landscape, which, throughout the centuries, was peopled with elves and trolls, huldufolk and other beings. These stories were, for instance, used like fairy-tales, to warn children. Solvi Sveinsson, an Icelandic headmaster, mentioned in a short presentation in Gerduberg, a cultural centre in Reykjavik 1999, that folktales were used as a kind of a “fence” to keep children close to the farm. Based on that idea, I have drawn an outline of how these invisible creatures populated the landscape around an Icelandic farm in an 18th century watercolour, with the child “fenced” in the middle (see illustration on the next page).

The stories about people’s interaction with these creatures were preserved in folktales, and almost all Icelandic folktales are associated with a certain place. The place would, in most instances, be given a name in connection to the folktale. Hence, the whole of Iceland could be folktale-mapped, with certain areas more crowded than others.



Thuridur Johannsdottir points out that “In order for the folktale to work when it is told the listener must admit to believing in the supernatural, be a part of a culture which believes in the existence of huldurfolk, outlaws, etc.” (Johannsdottir 1999, 153). If that works, the landscape becomes a living entity, inside and outside the mind. What makes the recounting of folktales in relation to landscape in Icelandic children’s books different from the same in their English counterparts (e.g. Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*) is that the writer can with a near-certainty assume that the reader is willing to participate in the belief that such an event could have taken place on that very spot.

Icelandic children’s books play a significant part in the sustaining the folktale-mapping of the national landscape. The chance of relating some folktale or the other when a place in the countryside is passed is hardly ever missed by an Icelandic children’s book author. Recounting a story in relation to a place gives added meaning to it, bestows it with life, and makes its mapping into the *paysage intérieur* easier. In Gudlaug Richter’s *Sonur Sigurdar* (1987), the two young men hide in a cave in a cliff by the sea. Not far from the cave, a strange-looking crag rises from the sea. Grjotgardur tells his half-brother a tale about the “Night-troll”:

A male troll lived in Ulfudarnes-mountain, not far from here. He had a valued girlfriend across the fjord. She was a big and handsome female troll and they often visited each other. Once she decided to pay him a visit and wanted to cut the journey short by wading across the fjord. It took her longer than she thought. When she was only a few arm lengths from the coast, the sun came up and she turned into stone. The male troll could not bear to watch her stone figure every day, so he moved away. Since then, no troll has lived on this peninsula.

(My transl., Richter 1987, 56)

In Iceland, almost every strange or human-looking crag has a story similar to this attached to it. Thorvaldur Saemundsson’s *Bjartir dagar*, for instance, states: “Close to the hollow there is a large, peculiar-looking crag called Greystone. Some say it is an elf-church” (Saemundsson 1976, 12). The children from a Reykjavik Youth Centre in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir’s *Thad sem enginn ser* ride past Jorukleif, which their leader tells them is a crag associated with Jora, a female troll, and they should better watch out (Hrolfsdottir 1998, 155). In pre-book times, landscape was explained through myth, and named

according to myth, and the myth, passed orally from person to person, kept the landscape alive. The naming meant that the landscape could be labelled and mapped in the human mind, associated with a story involving man's interaction with nature or supernatural powers. As such, myth gives new meaning to landscape, and landscape gives new meaning to myth. This relation still lives on, and probably nowhere as strongly as in children's books. French anthropologist Christophe Pons surveyed supernatural belief in Iceland and claims: "I think I can assert that the culturally specific views that reigned at the time when the folktales were recorded [i.e. the 19th century] still, for the most part, prevail" (Pons 1998, 162).

The Icelanders tend to believe that elves live in hills and mounds in the landscape. They are not funny little creatures with pointed ears and green hats and bells on their shoes, but people who look much like us – yet very slightly smaller. The unseen people who co-inhabit the land with the Icelanders have, just as the visible part of the nation, a claim to the land. In his article, "Do Elves Have Rights?" Jeremy Harte considers instances where planning officers have needed to take into account if a project will endanger an elf settlement of elves, and names Iceland and Ireland as examples of places where such consideration is needed. Harte says: "Maybe it is their marginal position in the European world-view which encourages small nations to take a positive attitude to other realities" (Harte 1998). In both Iceland and Ireland, there is a strong belief in "spelled spots", which must not be disturbed because it would upset the supernatural beings who live there – who then may take their revenge on the intruders. In Iceland, even in the 1990s, roads have been redirected at great expense because they would cut through elf-inhabited places. In some instances, as Bob Rickard points out, a medium has intervened to settle the claims and give the elves a chance to move (Rickard 1994; Rickard 1996).

The belief in elf residences and "spelled spots" is at the centre of many Icelandic books discussed here. Steini, the young boy of Thorvaldur Saemundsson's autobiographical account, *Bernskunnar strond* (1973), is strongly aware of the presence of supernatural

beings in the landscape. He is given a collection of Jon Arnason's folk and fairy tales for Christmas and senses a difference between the two genres, because one is a part of his real life and the other of his imagination:

These stories strongly affect my imagination. The other-world creation of fairy tales, where the imagination is set free and all kinds of visions appear in my mind's eye, is a fascinating reading. Stories on elves and the hidden people, which I have heard or read before, seem more real to me. Every day I pass strange hills and crags that we, the kids, have been told are inhabited by such creatures. On reading the stories it is like the doors to their habitations are fully opened and one catches a glimpse into their homes, where everything shines and glows of finery, wealth and beauty.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1973, 136)

Stories of the huldufolk and elves are a part of Steini's reality: to him, they are as real as the hills and crags around his home. In the sequel to this story, the boy, now much older, is taking a flock of sheep to a valley near his home.

There are peaceful groves and strange-looking crags, and it's a great place for play. But one must be careful around these places, because people say that the huldufolk live there, and they don't want shouting or running humans around their homes. All the kids have been strictly told not to annoy the huldufolk, because their vengeance can be bitter if their anger is aroused. To prove that, we have been told a lot of stories, which I remember clearly.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1976, 10)

Steini, or the young Saemundsson, was growing up in the early 20th century. An even stronger presence of hidden people, and their anger if disturbed, is to be found in Gudlaug Richter's historical novel, *Jora og eg* (1988), set in 1104. Jora, a young girl, has a momentary lapse in her belief that there are inhabitants in a crag near her home and believes she pays dearly for her short-lived scepticism. She is told by her grandmother to regularly take food on a tray and leave it for the *vaettir*, or earth spirits, that live in the crag. One day Jora gets the idea that this is absurd and gives the food to the dogs instead. In the middle of the next night, the biggest earthquake she has ever experienced occurs and the girl observes: "I have heard that this could happen only if the *vaettir* get really angry" (Richter 1988, 25). Her grandmother tells her: "There is life all around us, in each mountain, in each waterfall and each mound . . . Man is fairly powerless where the *vaettir* are concerned" (Richter 1988, 35). Jora has a premonition when she sees a man leave the crag:

It was not just one man, but a procession of people streaming out of the crag, men, women and children, and they were also bringing livestock. Most of them were carrying a bag or some parcels on their shoulders. And all of them walked determinedly towards the north, along the dry stone wall. It took her a while to get her thoughts clear. But then she was petrified. They were the inhabitants of the crag and they were obviously moving away. That left the three of them, alone and deserted in the cold arms of the northern mountains.

(My transl., Richter 1988, 37)

Although humans are in awe of the supernatural beings, they want them near in order to protect them. Jora is petrified to see them leave: she, her father and her grandmother feel exposed to the evil of the mountains after they have gone. Moreover, according to folk belief, their moving away means that some natural disaster is about to happen. And it does: the earthquake turns out to be the first sign of the great Mt. Hekla eruption in 1104, which turns Jora's surroundings into a dark inferno, filling the air with ashes and dust, killing her father and her grandmother. They were unshielded by the people in the crag, who had left them. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf point out in their Introduction to *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legends* (1991) that such belief is not uncommon:

From the perspective of the church, the spirits of the farm, forest, field, river, lake, sea, and air were typically seen as evil, and blessings, exorcisms, amulets and other sacred devices were used to protect the human community. Today it is easy to dismiss the people's belief in these spirits, along with the church's response to them, as mere superstitions, but that is quite beside the point. Perceiving their daily environment in prescientific but eminently practical terms, the people responded to nature in the way they experienced it, namely as animate and possessed of will and thus capable of aiding humans but also of doing them harm . . . The relation between the human community and the spirits of nature thus depended upon mutuality and respect.

(Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991, 9)

Jora's story is set in 1104, when folk belief was much stronger than now: it controlled the way people behaved, and sacrifices were made for them, like Jora's food on a tray every day. Yet, as the DV survey shows and Christophe Pons points out (above), this belief is still strong, and it is continued by contemporary writing for children. The protection of hidden people is also one of the subjects in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Her a reiki* (1996), which is set in contemporary times. Metta, a "problem youth" from Reykjavik spends the summer at a deserted farm, which is being renovated by a young couple. An expatriate, a

descendant of the Canadian immigrants mentioned above, who has been brought up in Canada on a consistent diet of stories about the huldufolk in Iceland, visits the farm. She approaches the young girl one day when Metta is observing the remnants of human residence in a deserted valley:

– My mother told me that huldufolk go away when people leave, Louise said behind Metta.

– What?

– Huldufolk and humans lived together in peace. My mother said the cliff changes when huldufolk leave, just like an old house where nobody lives anymore. Cliffs bend over, like an old turf cottage nobody tends to. When men and huldufolk leave, sometimes bad things remain, my mother said.

– What bad things?

– The other, which we cannot see. Could be dead people, grouchy elves, stuff like that.

Strange. Louise, who wasn't even born in Iceland, was the person who best understood supernatural things.

(My transl., Hrolfsdottir 1996, 56)

Now Metta feels she has an explanation why there are bad spirits haunting her around the house that has recently been renovated: huldufolk are no longer there to protect the humans from evil.

In numerous contemporary books about elves and huldufolk, people can only tell that they are the “unseen” because of their clothing, which has remained unchanged since the 19th century. This happens, for example in Adalsteinn A. Sigurdsson's *Dvergasteinn* (“Dwarf Stone”, 1991), when Ugla, the young girl protagonist, sees a small man, which she thinks is just a boy. She is just about to give him a lash of her tongue, when she is silenced by the sight of his clothes: “They are red and green and made of some strange material. They are also old-fashioned, although she cannot exactly figure out what is so old-fashioned about them” (Sigurdsson 1991, 29). Andres Indridason's *Aevintyralegt samband* (1997), has, however, modernized the elf-image, which symbolises the integration of supernatural belief into modern, everyday life. This is the story of a young boy, Alfur, who discovers when he is fourteen that he is an elf. His father, a policeman, and his mother, a mail-carrier, tell him that they have actually been planted in the human world by their fellow elves in order to hinder the destruction of their clan's mound, which lies across the street

from their house. They take him to see his family in the elf-world inside the mound, which looks like the human world.

They were right when they said that elves looked no different than men. He saw no huge, pointed ears or badly upturned noses when he looked around him. He saw no elf maids dance in snowy white communion gowns. No magic wands flew through the air. Nobody wore seven-mile-shoes. No-one was playing tricks.

(My transl., Indridason 1997, 48)

The elves even have a glass-roofed mall, with a MacDonald's restaurant and a Benetton shop. A conflict occurs when the young Alfur falls in love with the daughter of a man contracted to turn the mound into a building site with his bulldozer. Friendly communication between the elf world and the human world resolves the problem and the elf settlement is saved. An event which has actually happened in real life, the negotiation of space between elves and humans, has here found its way into books, with a light sprinkle of humour.

Illugi Jokulsson also blends irony and commercialism with folk belief in *Silfurkrossinn* (1996). A young brother and sister, Gunnsi and Magga, feel that their house is haunted and find out that a blonde girl in their street can, like her mother, see things that are hidden to other people. They want her to come to their house.

On the way over there, she talked relentlessly. Gunnsi and Magga couldn't understand half of what she said; she talked about all kinds of strange things that she and her mother had seen; about elves and huldufolk, which Magga and Gunni recognized from folk tales, about ghosts and dwarves, which they also knew about, but then she went on talking about gnomes and fetches, mermen and spirits and light elves and leprechauns and fairies, and then the brother and sister totally lost her. They knew one thing for sure: the blonde girl was no ordinary girl. She and her mother had travelled all over the country to observe these strange creatures, and they had even entered a dwarf stone once, no, not once, but twice, and they had also joined the huldufolk for a party, and they had helped to exorcise a poltergeist in some place in the country that Gunnsi and Magga had never heard of.

(My transl., Jokulsson 1996, 54)

With the help of the blonde girl, Gunnsi and Magga find out what the spirit in their house needs to be able to rest: a silver cross. While incorporating folk belief into his story, Jokulsson can, tongue-in-cheek, allow himself to see the humour in it, to mock his own, and his fellow countrymen's, somewhat quaint belief in the supernatural.

Illugi Jökulsson, like other Icelandic children's books writers, is writing into a culture which openly admits to its belief in the supernatural. Stories of elves and other hidden people need not be fantasy: they can hover on the brink between fantasy and reality. "Realistic" stories, like Moller and Sigurdardottir's *Grilladir bananar* ("Barbequed bananas" 1996) and Thorgrímur Thraínsson's *Nottin lifnar víð* ("The night comes alive" 1998), place young people against an often hostile landscape. In both of these books, a group of ten children go on a camping trip to a place in the lava-covered wilderness of Iceland, and the rocky crags take on supernatural forms that make the children uneasy. The awe with which the children in both these books regard rock formations — as if they believe they are coming alive — matches the awe of my children and other "real life" children that I know in Iceland (and even adults, including myself). To an Icelandic child, a story about a child's interaction with elves in a mound is probably a lot more realistic than stories about talking animals, which hardly exist in the Icelandic culture. According to folktales, livestock was supposed to get the gift of the human tongue on New Year's Eve, as a part of elf magic, but Icelandic children's books writers have not been fond of writing stories about talking rats or rabbits. Indeed, when I first suggested translating Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) into Icelandic, the publisher commented that talking polar bears could be an obstruction for the Icelandic reader: they would make the fantasy absurd. Granted, English children's books writers are, in general, writing into a culture that accepts talking animals, as English culture has a long-standing tradition of this genre of writing.

In England, however, small unseen human-like creatures belong to fantasy, a genre, or to the ignorant people of old times, and not to reality, or quasi-reality, as in the case of Iceland. England's history of folklore, legends and beliefs is more complex than in Iceland. Whereas Iceland's isolated or "marginal" location has contributed to the preservation of its folklore and folk belief, England's central position has brought about many changes and additions to the Celtic belief, which dominated the country 2,500 years

ago.¹⁷ Marc Alexander claims that “most of the information about [the Celtic people’s] mythology comes from the British Isles, particularly Wales and Ireland, where stories and sagas were preserved” (Alexander 1982, 9). The inside cover of Alexander’s book states: “Every invader, refugee or settler has helped contribute some new element or twist to the complex pattern of our national heritage, and new myths are still in the making.” Local legends have found their way into many English children’s books, as well as folklore and legends borrowed from other cultures. Some well-known books of this kind include William Mayne’s *Earthfasts* (1969), Geraldine McCaughrean’s *The Stones are Hatching* (1999) and Susan Cooper’s *The Dark is Rising* sequence (1965, 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1977).

Alan Garner is one of the most famous English writers to successfully incorporate folktales and myth into children’s books. In his first book for children, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), he blends a local Cheshire tale with Arthurian legend and adds elements from Norse mythology to weave a tale very firmly rooted in the web of mines and tunnels and underground caves of the Cheshire landscape. Garner’s Svartalfar may originate in Norse mythology and speak Icelandic (the wizard explains on page 30 that they are so-called “in their own tongue” – *svart* means “black” and *alfar* “elves” in Icelandic), but they do not look like people:

They stood about three feet high and were man-shaped, with thin, wiry bodies and limbs, and broad, flat feet and hands. Their heads were large, having pointed ears, round saucer eyes, and gaping mouths which showed needle-sharp teeth. Some had pug-noses, others long, thin snouts reaching to their chins. Their hides were generally of a fish-white colour, though some were black, and all were practically hairless.

(Garner 1960, 32)

The wizard also tells the children that the svartalfar have no magic (39). “Lios-alfar” (*ljosalfar*, or light-elves, in Icelandic), are, on the other hand, kind and magical. Later on, the children meet Durathror son of Gondemar, who claims to be “prince of the Huldrafolk

¹⁷ Marc Alexander points out that Neolithic Britons raised stone circles “long before the pyramids were planned.” They gave way before the Beaker people who in return retreated from the Celts 2,500 years ago. Footnote continued on next page.

and friend to the lios-alfar” (Garner 1960, 109). Trolls from Norse mythology are also mentioned: “Troll-women: from rock they are spawned, and to rock they return if the sun should find them above ground” (Garner 1960, 182). And the hills are alive:

A mile away, above the cross-roads on Monk's Heath, a grassy hill stood out above the land. It was like a smaller Shuttlingslow-or a tumulus. It had the tumulus' air of mystery; it was subtly different from the surrounding country; it *knew* more than the field in which it had roots. And this uneasy mood was heightened by a group of Scots pines that crowned the summit. They leaned towards each other, as though sharing secrets.

(Garner 1960, 172-173)

Living hills, huldudfolk, elves and trolls have found their way into English children's literature, but to the English child reader they are magical, “other-worldly” – and fascinating, and not a part of normal, everyday life. Like Santa-Claus, they are things that children might believe in, but, when they grow up and get wiser and find out about technology and science, they put such childish nonsense aside. Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967), set in the landscape of Wales, based on myths from the Welsh *Mabinogion* – a collection of Welsh prose tales collected between the 11th and the 13th century – has the English boy, Roger, ridicule the Welsh boy's belief in the hollow stone legend. English legend may be alive in literature but not in “real life”. Marc Alexander recalls a book written on fairies by Reverend Robert Kirk, called *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* in 1691, commenting: “Thanks to Kirk, fairies were taken seriously by following writers who kept their tradition alive in literature when popular belief in them waned” (Alexander 1982, 93; Kirk 1990). In Iceland, however, the belief in supernatural beings has been kept alive, both in literature and in reality. Benony Aegisson's short story “Tritlaveislan” (“The Tiny People's Party” 1985) may reveal why the hidden people have disappeared from England, but are now alive and kicking in Iceland. The little boy, Doddi, tells his parents that he has seen a little man coming out of “The Dwarf's Cave” on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, and his mother tells him and his sister, Vala, that there is no such thing as hidden little people:

“And it is with them that British mythology begins, confused though it is.” Marc Alexander, *British Folklore, Myths and Legends* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, 9).

– Huldufolk do exist, Vala said. – Don't they, Dad?
– Not in Reykjavik, Dad said, – I know that for sure. But they say there's a lot of them here on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. Some say that all the huldufolk from Europe moved over here when they fled the huge cities, industrialization and pollution.
– Maybe there's a lot of people all around us, which we cannot see, Vala said, and her eyes opened wide.

(My transl., Aegisson 1985, 31-32)

The statement that tradition lives longer “on the periphery” may have emerged from the notion that elves and fairies escaped from the metropolitan, defiled, densely populated areas of Europe! The fact remains that as Icelandic children grow up, they learn to go about their daily routines and “see” the landscape around them as “alive”, that is, populated with beings that deserve mutual respect.

This chapter has surveyed some similarities and dissimilarities in how English and Icelandic children's books portray the “attachment” to the people and the place, or locale, where a child grows up, where he or she first lived and “learned to see.” It has examined ways in which people inhabit a particular place – the sphere of routine activity and interaction, which is “richly suffused with meanings” (quotations refer to the ideas of Raymond Williams, Tony Watkins and Peter Wallace Preston at the beginning of this chapter). We have seen that this first concept of home is important in the formation of national identity, and we have also seen that children's books have a significant role in sustaining particular notions concerning locality and the “looking at landscape” which is celebrated by the nation. The next chapter widens the scope, away from locality into the second notion of home: the “homeland,” in country and city, and the “networks of exchanges with others” – the combination of which constitutes a large part of our national identity.

CHAPTER 7

HOMELAND AND *HEIMAT*

Identity does not arise spontaneously but is learned. The learning in the immediate sphere of the locale will be direct. One will learn how to fill in the blanks . . . as one moves through one's routines. . . The learning in the more public sphere will be less direct, a matter of the presentation of private self in the public sphere. Learning how to salute a flag is not the same as learning one's way around the local neighbourhood. It is a shift from the intimate detail of practical forms of life to abstract general formulations. It is an exchange with ordered understandings ranging from folk knowledges through institutional knowledges to official ideologies.

(Preston 1997, 49)

The direct learning of identity “in the immediate sphere of the locale” has been explored in the last chapter, that is, how children are “taught to see” in their immediate environment. As Peter W. Preston clarifies, there is a shift from this local or private learning to the “abstract general formulations” of the wider national network of exchanges with others. This expansion involves a maturity of the feelings for the “homeland” in country or city.

Whereas my discussion in the last chapter centred on the individual and his or her relationship with landscape, this chapter focuses on the concept of the nation and the communal experience of landscape. I argue that the children's literature of a particular nation provides a key to understanding the nation's frame of mind, what stirs its emotions and provokes its thoughts. It reveals the nature of the nation's relationship with its surroundings, its interaction with the national landscape and its concept of space. Moreover, it can demonstrate how the national imagination is linked with the local landscape and its peculiarities through memories, myths and meanings.

This chapter is divided into five sections, the first of which explores the idea of having “roots” in the homeland, as well as some approaches to nationalism. The main theme of this chapter as a whole is that of myths, and how myths shape the interaction between

nation and landscape. The myths that concern the notion of country and city are reviewed in the second and third sections, first in English, then in Icelandic children's literature. The next section reviews "representative landscapes" in England and Iceland, that is, the role of symbolic landscapes in the preservation of national identity, and how these are portrayed in children's books of both nations. *Heimat* – the word in German for homeland, which here stands for the irretrievable landscape of childhood – is the subject of the fifth and last section.

7.1. Roots in the Native Landscape

The nation is conceived of as a territorial *patria*, the place of one's birth and childhood, the extension of hearth and home. It is also the place of one's ancestors and of the heroes and cultures of one's antiquity.

(Smith 1991, 117)

There is a strong link between landscape and national identity, and, as briefly discussed in the last chapter, the idea that a person's national identity is rooted in his or her national landscape is prevalent, and by no means fading. The Icelanders have never hesitated to talk about "roots" and are fond of the idea that they have literally sprouted from its earth. As referred to earlier, the boy in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar strond* "feels strongly that this is where his life originated, here lie the roots of his life. He is closely bonded to this familiar environment, to this peculiar beach – a tiny fragment of its rock" ("Childhood's Coast" Saemundsson 1973, 9). A character in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Her a reiki* agrees: "– Yes, our roots reach deep into this land, Kristjana said and stood up" ("Spirits in the air" Hrolfsdottir 1996, 127). However, in the 1960s and 1970s in England, national identity and patriotism were delicate subjects, according to Jeffrey Richards, "because of their nineteenth-century overtones of race, empire and hierarchy" (Richards 1997, xi). Richards claims that since the Falklands War in 1982, there has been a massive academic interest in national identity, national character and patriotism. Surely, the outrageous nationalism of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 40s had a huge influence in turning the eyes of the world away from extreme ideas of roots and race, but still, in this era of emerging nations and cultures, the concept of roots has regained much

recognition. Martin Heidegger's notions about roots and the homeland have been retrieved and resurrected with much more caution than before WWII. David Harvey discusses some of Heidegger's concepts:

The flourishing of any genuine work of art, Heidegger insists (1966: 47-8), depends upon its roots in a native soil. 'We are plants which - whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not - must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and bear fruit.' Deprived of such roots, art is reduced to a meaningless caricature of its former self. The problem, therefore, is to recover a viable homeland in which meaningful roots can be established. Place construction should be about the recovery of roots, the recovery of the art of dwelling.

(Harvey 1993, 11; Heidegger 1966)

The homeland of an artist, for instance a writer, has indeed a considerable effect on any work he or she produces. It is, according to Heidegger, important to cultivate a sense of place, of roots and dwelling. Places are meaningful, both for individuals and groups of people, and so is the experience of place. As Anthony D. Smith points out, "People and territory must, as it were, belong to each other" (Smith 1991, 9). Smith goes on to say:

The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where 'our' sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought. All this makes the homeland unique. Its rivers, coasts, lakes, mountains and cities become 'sacred' - places of veneration and exaltation whose inner meanings can be fathomed only by the initiated, that is, the self-aware members of the nation. The land's resources also become exclusive to the people; they are not for 'alien' use and exploitation.

(Smith 1991, 9)

Each culture creates an archetypal landscape myth that in turn shapes the physical landscape, as discussed later in this chapter. Landscapes may become so much a familiar part of everyday life that they are merely lived in and taken for granted, like the "unwaved flag", or they may be more myth than physical reality. The myths, however, and their constant reiteration and association with landscape, are important for the preservation of national identity as Stephen Daniel points out:

National identities are co-ordinated, often largely defined, by "legends and landscapes"; by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery. . . . Landscapes, whether focusing on single monuments or framing stretches of scenery, provide visible shape: they picture the nation.

(Daniels 1993, 5)

The legends that people tell and the landscapes they cherish symbolize the ideals particularly treasured by that nation. Heritage and “golden ages” will be discussed in Chapter 8, but here the focus is on how myth has shaped the “homeland”, first the approaches to concepts of country and city, and then to representative landscapes.

7.2. England: The Pastoral Vision

God made the country, and man made the town.
William Cowper, “The Task”, 1785

The concept of Eden has been a persistent construct within the consciousness of Western writers, an unspoiled spot where true bliss awaits, as Ernest J. Yanarella points out: “Whether in Homer’s Elysium, Hesiod’s Island of the Blessed Days, or Virgil’s Arcadia, this place of perfect rest and inner harmony was always characterized as a garden” (Yanarella 1988, 161). Both in poetry and in fiction, man is perpetually trying to return to the celestial garden from which he was evicted after having tasted the forbidden fruit. English writers of children’s literature — particularly in the genre of fairy tale and fantasy — demonstrate this predicament in a number of ways, using metaphors for the boundaries which seemingly can never be crossed. As an example, Alice in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), has to go through a series of bodily changes in order to get the key to the magical garden, and Mary Lennox of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1910), traces the walls of the secret garden for days on end, trying to find a way in. Outside the gates of Paradise, man is in the wilderness: he is vulnerable and readily open to paganism. In order to keep evil at bay, he must change wilderness into civilisation, trying his best to re-create God’s exclusive garden. The Englishman in particular has fared well in this process: the country has been shaped and re-shaped to fit his aesthetic and utilitarian needs, and boundaries have been erected — most of them invisible — to keep areas with varying degrees of civilisation apart, as discussed in the last chapter. The function of this section is to link English children’s literature with ideas about social space and the ideological function of landscape, both in the country and the

city, and thereby showing how the social construct and education of children is allied to the construction of place.

English landscapes went through a series of changes with the wave of urbanisation which hit the country following the major industrialisation of the nineteenth century. Obviously, technological progress has had a tremendous influence on the English people's interrelationship with the landscape. The population distribution for the year 2000 shows that 90% of people in the United Kingdom live in towns and cities (United Nations Statistics Division 2000). Somehow, as Raymond Williams has observed in *The Country and the City*, the English, from the Romantics on, have tended to regard urbanisation as a negative development. Williams talks about "that very powerful myth of modern England in which the transition from a rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of fall, the true cause and origin of our social suffering and disorder." (Williams 1985, 96). This myth prevails: ideally, English landscapes should show no signs of human intervention; the countryside should come as close to a recreation of Eden as possible. Michael Bunce calls this "the countryside ideal":

[T]he countryside ideal has emerged with the evolution of industrial society, in the development of the myths and values that have come to be associated with the countryside as well as with the evolution of its actual use and treatment. . . . this is not just a recent phenomenon but . . . it is deeply entrenched in our culture and our landscape history.

(Bunce 1994, 3)

The opposites of city and country have been based on the assumptions that whereas city life is frantic and means work, the countryside is quiet, a place for rest and recreation, as Fred Inglis explains: "Landscape in our society is counterposed to townscape much as leisure is counterposed to work. Landscape, we may say, is allocated to the realm of private feeling, townscape to the realm of public business" (Inglis 1990, 198). John R. Short agrees:

The countryside has become the 'real' England, the 'unchanging' England. It has become the land of retreat from an increasingly urban and overwhelmingly industrial society, the place to escape modernity.

(Short 1991, 75)

Nowhere has this idyllic countryside been as much praised as in Romantic literature, and the image persists in English children's books. J. Douglas Porteous points out that "the tradition in children's literature has been to glorify the pastoral scene and be, at best, rather ambiguous about the urban" (Porteous 1990, 150-51). The representation of the rural idyll and the urban "monster" still prevail in children's books at the end of the twentieth century.

Peter Hunt observes that authors of children's books, especially those writing fantasies, seem to prefer landscape which bears no sign of modern civilization. Reviewing some examples from English fantasy, e.g. Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), Hunt notes how the landscape in these books has been modified "by authors who quietly edit out the less attractive aspects of modern England" (Hunt 1987, 13). *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame 1908) isolated the pastoral idyll of the riverbank world from the threatening ravages of civilization. Closer to contemporary times, Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), depicts a group of rabbits, which live in the wonderful Watership Down:

Nowadays, among fields and woods, the noise level by day is high-too high for some kinds of animal to tolerate. Few places are far from human noise-cars, buses, motor-cycles, tractors, lorries. The sound of a housing estate in the morning is audible a long way off. . . . During the last fifty years the silence of much of the country has been destroyed. But here, on Watership Down, there floated up only faint traces of the daylight noise below.

(Adams 1972, 110-11)

The rabbits get chased from their home by the onrush of civilisation and travel through the English countryside searching for a new home. They confirm Raymond Williams' notion about the Fall, when Fiver says: "There's terrible evil in the world," to which Holly replies, "It comes from men. . . . They live on the earth and they need food. Men will never rest till they've spoiled the earth and destroyed the animals" (Adams 1972, 130). Apparently, in the consciousness of a body of English writers of fantasy for children, England should remain the same as it was before the 1880s, without the smoke and stench of industry and the social stress of urbanization. Peter Hunt identifies this "pastoral paradise", which seems to correspond with the Romantic notion of an unspoiled and

idyllic England, vaguely located in time before 1914, or between the wars, and spatially in the Thames valley or in “the shires” (Hunt 1987, 12)

This place of “central Englishness,” as Hunt calls it, in English fantasy books for children, does not necessarily have an exact physical counterpart, but when it does, it tends to be a place which has a richness of meaning relating to history and myth. This happens, for example, in Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960). By writing the book and reviving the local myths, Garner has added another cultural layer to the landscape of Cheshire, which consequently, to some, has become Garner’s Cheshire. As in *Watership Down*, there are few signs of modern civilization. The protagonists in Garner’s story, Susan and Colin, take a walk to the Edge, and feel that “There was no end to the peace and beauty” (22). When September arrives and school has started, their visits to the Edge become rarer because, as already mentioned, the ignorant townsfolk had ruined it with their wrappings and empty bottles (Garner 1960, 77). Civilization and pollution has turned the “lios-alfar” away, as Durathror explains to Colin and Susan:

“To them beauty is food and life, and dirt and ugliness, death. When men turned from the sun and the earth, and corrupted the air with the smoke of furnaces, it was poison to the lios-alfar. . . . Wherever men now were, there were noise and grime.”

(Garner 1960, 178)

After having survived two centuries of exploitation and abuse, the ideal of the countryside must not be spoilt by townsfolk. Its spirit, which must be kept alive, is the spirit of Englishness.

The disgust for every sign of civilization is also portrayed in yet another animal story, W. J. Corbett’s *The Song of Pentecost*:

Once this part of the world had been rich farming lands. But one day the City spilled over. For the Harvest mice in particular, it was the end to a way of life. . . . Wasn’t Pentecost Farm their own land? Than why were the Humans destroying it, and with what right? But they had yet to learn that might was right. Eventually, only the stream with its strip of green along either side remained to remind them of a world nearly totally destroyed. . . So they stayed close to the stream and learned to survive in a changed world.

(Corbett 1982, 12-13)

The countryside is beautiful because it does not have the negative aspects of the city: garbage and noise, which uneducated urbanites bring along to spoil the rural idyll. J. Douglas Porteous claims that as the binary opposites of city and country grew and became sharper, landscape became to be valued for what it is *not*. “It is as if beauty can be appreciated only when it is threatened or matched by some closely proximate ugliness” (Porteous 1990, 110). A country scenery is cherished because there are no factories to blemish the view and there is no motorway running through it. In eliminating all signs of civilization, writers are creating what Peter Hunt calls a “literary image of England” (Hunt 1987, 13). A reader who merely knows England from those literary depictions – for example the Australian writer discussed earlier, Jill Ker Conway – may be surprised to find that the “real” England is thoroughly tainted by civilization.

The children’s books quoted above were written either early in the twentieth century, when Romanticism was still lingering, or in the 1960s and 1970s, when people were looking over their shoulder to the Romantic period before industrialization. Fred Inglis talks about “the Romantic creation of landscape as the icon of freedom: the validation of the individual’s free feelings in the classless, commonly-owned space of the garden of Eden” (Inglis 1990, 209). Yet, as children’s books show, there is no such thing as a “classless” landscape in England. Classlessness may be imagined in animal books or books about children roaming the countryside alone and unperturbed by the outside world, but in enclosed spaces and in the “real” England, classes are canyons apart. In *The Tulip Touch* (Fine 1996), for instance, Natalie and Tulip, who are from a very different background, play freely in the open, but at school and in their very different homes, the question of class is involved.

We have already seen in the last chapter how an invisible class distinction in the country has been imposed upon city landscape. English children’s books writers tend to portray certain areas of the big cities, as evil, for example in books about “slum” children. Sylvia Sherry’s *A Pair of Jesus Boots* shows the distinction:

Down one side loomed the other end of St Catherine's Buildings, lighted windows punched in a chequered design down its dark length, and opposite was a row of crumbling shops and houses, half of them empty, about to be pulled down. The Cats stopped at the end of the Terrace, huddling in the shadows of a partially demolished building.

(Sherry 1969, 3)

There is, as stated, a canyon between the slum and the good part of the city. In Berlie Doherty's *Street Child*, the sick mother, Mrs. Jarvis takes her children through the city: "She led the children away from the slums where they had lived for the past year and down street after street until they came to a much quieter part of town, where the houses were big and stately" (Doherty 1993, 12). London is even bad and polluted in a secondary, or parallel world, as Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) shows. Lyra, the protagonist, is walking through that London with her dæmon, Pantalaimon, by her side:

She knew that Pantalaimon, padding on wildcat-paws beside her, felt the same joy as she did to be in the open air, even if it was murky London air laden with fumes and soot and clangorous with noise.

(Pullman 1995, 100)

Although London has its attractions and its adventures has bad sides as well, lurking evil, danger and pollution.

The city tends to be depicted as some kind of a hell in English children's books, as for instance in Leon Garfield's *John Diamond* (1980), set in Hogarthian England. William has just arrived in London, where he sees signs of hell, and the place smells like hell, and he hears the shouts and curses of "demons" (Garfield, 1980, 37). Again, Raymond Williams' idea that urbanisation is a kind of a Fall, is brought to mind. A vicious-looking black dog in London sniffs at the boy's coat:

I suppose my clothes still had some country smells about them that reminded the dog of the open air and fields; for it wouldn't leave me alone and kept pushing its nose into me and turning round to the parlour as if to say: 'I told you so! I told you all along that there *was* a countryside! Come and have a smell!'

(Garfield, 1980, 90-91)

Seemingly, the city is so far removed from the country that city people (and dogs) have forgotten what the concept means. The city, with its bright lights and long nights, has

lured people away from the country, but its beauty is treacherous, according to the Fox in W. J. Corbett's *The Song of Pentecost*:

For a while, he gazed about him, noting the familiar lights twinkling from the farmhouse windows far below. And beyond that peaceful scene, a sight that never ceased to fascinate him, the band of multi-coloured brilliance stretching across the horizon that was the outer sprawl of the great city. But it was a dangerous beauty, and deceptive, for, close to, its mean dinginess had shocked Fox whilst on his occasional 'dustbinning' forays.

(Corbett 1982, 135).

The city has lured many a soul from the country and never returned them. Dorothy in Berlie Doherty's *Granny was a Buffer Girl* feels imprisoned by the endless slate roofs of Sheffield:

Dorothy sighed, and turned her head so that she could see out of her window to where the moonlight gleamed on the slate roof of Albert's house, and all down the terrace of slate roofs, and beyond that another street of slate roofs, and beyond that again another.

(Doherty 1986, 42-3)

Dorothy knows that she will never get away from all this, and the next morning she agrees to marry Albert.

To country people, the city is like a prison, it means something rotten, something that can spoil you, as Melvin Burgess' *An Angel for May* illustrates: "Mr. Nutter snorted as if London were some sort of disease" (Burgess 1992, 39). To city people, however, it is "home". William, in Leon Garfield's *John Diamond*, is visiting his friend, Shot-in-the-Head, who lives on the roof of a London house:

He showed me round his estate, which extended for about six roofs in all directions. He was very proud of it and pointed out various beauties of the landscape, such as the sudden jewelled sight of the river, winking between clustering stacks.

(Garfield, 1980, 122-3)

William learns that although the city seems deceitful in its beauty, it can become part of the landscape of one's mind. He is particularly impressed with the idea of "courts" in London that simulate country scenes. When he has returned to his home in Hertford, he cannot forget the sights of the city:

Just as in teeming London there had been quiet courts enclosing fond remembrances of the country, so inside of me there was a court, only it enclosed a remembrance of the town. It beat and glittered and winked and shone, and not all the trees and fields and leafy lanes could put it out.

(Garfield 1980, 175)

This is a beautiful depiction of how a landscape can become a part of one's mind: a part of the *paysage intérieur*.

The image of the country and the city in recent English children's books seems to be getting more realistic; the impression that the countryside offers rural bliss for those that can get out of the city's bondage is waning. Raymond Williams points out in *The Country and the City*:

We have seen how often an idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of childhood: of delighted absorption in our own world, from which, eventually, in the course of growing up, we are distanced and separated, so that it and the world become things we observe . . . But what is interesting now is that we have had enough stories and memories of urban childhoods to perceive the same pattern . . . These urban ways and objects seem to have, in the literature, the same real emotional substance as the brooks, commons, hedges, cottages, festivals of the rural scene.

(Williams 1985, 297)

The process of considering a city landscape is just as important in the formation of character as country landscape, and it involves, according to Williams, a growth and alteration of consciousness. David Cadman and Geoffrey Payne propose that in order to change the city image, "we will have to look at ourselves and to the values that we espouse, for we build cities in our own likeness" (Cadman and Payne 1990, 6). I looked for a positive coverage of city life in the English books in my selection, but I could not find any. A few of the nineteen books that are written in the 1990s are set in a city or town, but the action takes place in a very secluded area, so that the image of the city as a place of dwelling in opposition to the country is not clear. The boy in David Almond's *Skellig* (1998), for example, seems to live in an isolated world on a small part of Falconer Road. Robert Swindells' *Stone Cold* (1993) and Melvin Burgess's *Junk* (1996) surely illustrate the dark side of city life. Susan Price's *The Sterkarm Handshake* (1998), which takes place on the very same spot in early twenty-first century and the sixteenth century,

highlights how ugly buildings have been erected to destroy the unspoilt and unpolluted landscape of the 1500s.

English national identity is almost always associated with the countryside: it is a rural scene which “typifies” England. Yet, only ten percent of the English live in rural areas. English children’s books continue the association, posing an “untouched”, yet heavily manipulated, rural landscape against the overflowing, defiled cities. Children’s books like *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame 1908), *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (Garner 1960) and *Watership Down* (Adams 1972) continue to be regarded as “classics” not only because they are well written, but also because they show an image of England that the English wish to identify with. This image serves to conserve English national identity.

English children’s books writers tend to think negatively of the city, but it is necessary to accept the inescapable fact that modern life means, mostly, city life, and people have to change their attitudes towards urban scenery. God made the country and we made the city and it is our responsibility to deal with it. The next section surveys how images of the country and city are portrayed in Icelandic children’s literature, and the linkage between images of these and Icelandic national identity.

7.3. Order and Chaos

Where a city will rise, the landscape must die.
(Jokulsson 1996, 5)

In response to urbanization and its discontents, the Icelandic people have also created an idyllic image of an unspoilt countryside, but it is — in accordance with the different landscape — much wilder than the English pastoral paradise, and totally free of any human intervention.

In the first part of the twentieth century, and up to the 1970s, there were very few Icelandic children’s books set in the city. Reykjavik is, in fact, Iceland’s only city, and when it was awarded city rights in 1786, only 170 people lived there. Around 1900,

almost 6,000 people lived in the city, and by 1950, the population had grown to 55,000. Now, at the Millennium, that number has doubled, and population distribution figures show that 93% of the nation lives in urban areas (United Nations Statistics Division 2000). The enormous growth of the capital shows that a lot of people have had to leave their farms, villages and towns to move to the city in order to get work. Meanwhile, the countryside has achieved associations with romance and adventure in the Icelandic mind; it is, as in England, a place for nostalgia and where you sense closeness to nature. However, the countryside has not lost its value as a place where people work. It has for a long while been a habit for city people to send their children to a farm for the summer to “learn” how to work properly. The idea is expressed in Gudjon Sveinsson’s short story, “Helga”, which tells the story of a boy who is sent to the country “to learn the fear of God and good manners” (Sveinsson 1985, 58). For example, when I was eight to twelve years old, my parents sent me to spend the summer holiday from school (mid-May to early September) at a farm where good, old values were preserved and children must do their share of all farm work. In fact, schools agreed to make summer holidays this long so that children could go to farms from the spring when lambs were born until the fall when the lambs were collected for slaughter. The children would return to the city much wiser, more mature, having breathed country air, eaten wholesome country food, drunk unpasteurised milk, absorbed the view of overwhelming mountains and glaciers, and smelled grass and manure.

Icelandic children’s books reflect this tradition and these beliefs. Out of the forty-three books in my selection, fifteen are set in the country or in a village or small town, in close relation to nature, and fourteen involve a journey from the city to the country with the return of a wiser individual. To illustrate the symbolism of that journey, I want to turn to Leo Marx’s ideas on the “middle landscape” as presented, for instance in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, which surveys the literary and political dimensions of American 19th century pastoral novels (Marx 1964). Marx claimed that the vital elements of the middle landscape is “the ordering of meaning and value

around the contrast between two styles of life, one identified with a rural and the other with an urban setting” (Marx 1964, 94). Ernest J. Yanarella sums up Marx’s ideas as represented in an article by Marx in 1968, commenting that American 19th century pastoral novels “have characteristically presented a fictional topography with three realms: an organized human settlement (city, town, village or community); a partially developed middle ground or landscape; and a wilderness” (Marx 1968, 122; Yanarella 1988, 163). The middle landscape, then, is a place between order and chaos, between a law-abiding, organized and safe community and an unrestrained and uncontrollable wilderness, which offers space for creativity and allows the imagination to roam free. Yanarella goes on to explain how the pastoral novel reflects this division:

Similarly triadic, the novel’s narrative structure has been divided into three plot segments: the retreat from the civilization in quest of a more natural existence; the exploration of creative possibilities of wild nature; and the return to organized society with greater wisdom and perhaps a wider identity.

(Marx 1972, 562-63; Yanarella 1988, 163)

Marx’s line of reasoning refers to the 19th century American pastoral novel, but I would argue that a number of contemporary Icelandic children’s books follow this same pattern in one way or another. Long after the final decline of the pastoral novel genre for adults, children’s books writers have retained a number of its components. The tension between the safety of the “home” environment and the wilderness “out there” is a sign of the fears and uncertainties that modern children have to face – and the story characters act out those fears in the middle landscape.

Thuridur Johannsdottir presented her ideas about the relationship between order and chaos in an article on visions of nature in Icelandic children’s books (Johannsdottir 1999).

Johannsdottir recalls that in the days when the farming community was Iceland’s main pattern of dwelling, farmland represented order, and the moors, mountains and uninhabited valleys symbolised chaos. Sagas and folktales tell of people that ventured into the chaos, encountered outlaws and supernatural beings, and returned all the wiser (or did not return at all). Now, however, after urbanisation, city life has come to represent order

and the countryside offers chaos for city children that journey into what seems to be another world: rural landscapes.

The oldest Icelandic children's book covered here, Eiríkur Sigurdsson's *Strakar í Straumey* ("Boys in the Isle of Straum" 1969) tells the story of two sons of a village doctor. When school is finished for the summer, they are bored. Smari (10 years) says to his brother, Vifill (12):

– I feel somehow, Vifill, that I don't know what to do with myself since the school closed. At least we had something to do when it was running. It's the middle of May already.

– You're right. Still, I wouldn't want to go to school in the summer. I would rather do some work in the open. Dad says that kids in Scandinavia only get 6-8 weeks summer holiday. I wouldn't want them to adopt that over here.

(Sigurdsson 1969, 6)

The text is obviously from the 1960s, when writers still had "wise" children discuss what is best for them. In more recent books, parents tell children what they think is best for them, and children can doubt those facts. The two boys' father in Sigurdsson's story sympathises with their restlessness and sends them to the Isle of Straum to work for the summer. They are very excited and take a walk around the village to watch the village people at work: "The grass was turning green. Spring had arrived in the northern hemisphere. The brothers returned to home with spring in their heart and filled with anticipation" (Sigurdsson 1969, 17).

It must be noted that spring and its arrival is a recurrent metaphor in Icelandic children's literature. Grass, and most of the vegetation "dies" in the autumn, and migrating birds leave. Winter is long, hard, cold, and dark. The first sight of spring gives the Icelanders a glint of hope for green grass, and they get the urge to travel to the country, if only for a camping weekend. Like Icelanders tend to do, the two brothers associate the anticipation of summer with going away to the Isle of Straum, to come into contact with nature. And like most children in Icelandic children's books, they encounter the supernatural, for them it comes in the form of an old monk who visits Smari in his dreams.

Ugla, the girl in Adalsteinn Asberg Sigurdsson's *Dvergasteinn* ("Dwarf Stone" 1991) goes to her grandmother's place in a village in the country to spend the summer, and gets to know a dwarf who resides in a stone in her grandmother's garden. Metta of Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Her a reiki* ("Spirits in the Air" 1996) spends the summer at a farm where dreams and supernatural beings haunt her. Svenni, the boy in my book, *Galdrastafir og graen augu* ("Magic Letters and Green Eyes" 1997), travels back in time to visit a farm in 1713, where he studies the use of magic letters and has all kinds of supernatural experiences. The children in Thorgrimur Thrainsson's *Nottin lifnar vid* ("The Night Comes Alive" 1998) and Ingibjorg Moller's *Radgata um raudanott* ("Mystery in the Middle of the Night" 1998) go camping outside Reykjavik and get into a series of terrifying adventures. In the latter, the children are on an island just a mile or so from the city of Reykjavik:

This was all so unreal. Beneath our feet were the rocky cliffs, then the sea, and a little bit further the houses of Reykjavik rose into the air, solid and imperturbable, whatever happened to us.

(My transl., Moller 1998, 129)

The children in all of those books return to their home in the town or city after the summer with a new vision of life, increased maturity, and a nostalgic glance over the shoulder towards the country life they experienced.

Nowadays, parents are afraid to send their children to a strange farm to spend the summer, and besides, there are not many farms left. This fact is illustrated with humour in Illugi Jokulsson's *Silfurkrossinn* ("The Silver Cross 1996):

Then the family went on a holiday; they drove around the country for a few weeks and visited the farms where father and mother had spent the summer when they were kids. Neither Gunnsi nor Magga had ever spent the summer on a farm. Of course they had often been on farms, but they had never spent more than a few hours there, mostly on school field trips. Father and mother often talked about how much fun they had had in the country, how many things they had learned and how they had matured, but when their children asked to go to the country, they became evasive. They started muttering about how dangerous it could be in the country, there were all kinds of hazardous tools and machinery, and vicious cows could butt them. And they would be among strangers, and you never know what could happen.

(My transl., Jokulsson 1996, 34-5)

The romantic vision of the countryside is just a vision, not reality. People still want children to get to know the country, but now it must be done under close parental supervision. The parents who spent their summers roaming freely through the countryside think it is dangerous for their offspring to do the same. This reflects a changing society, where children are overseen much more than in earlier days.

Even the children's books that are set entirely in the city portray tremendous nostalgia for country and village ways of life. Andres Indridason's *Manndomur* (1990) is set in Reykjavik during WWII. Advised by the British on the danger of German air attacks, city authorities have decided to evacuate all children to villages and farms in the country. The mother takes her two sons, Kalli (16) and Oli (6), who is to be an evacuee, to a park in Reykjavik on Midsummer Night:

The smell of freshly-cut grass welcomed us when we entered the park. A part of it had just been cut. This served as a reminder of the countryside and the wonderful life that awaited the children, as Mum pointed out with a smile. She was born and bred in the countryside herself and knew very well the difference between the healthy country air and the dusty air that city children had to breathe.
(Indridason 1990, 65)

Such nostalgia for the country and disgust for the city is also portrayed in *Tilbuinn undir treverk* ("Ready for Woodwork" Helgason 1998). Helgi, who works with the protagonist, Jens, is a farmer forced to move to the city. He takes up his wallet to show Jens a photograph: "This is where we used to live, me and my Sigrid, young lad. That's quite different from this atrocity" He looks around him with obvious disapproval. "This isn't for people – more for cars" (Helgason 1998, 70).

Like their English counterparts, Icelandic children's books tend to portray urbanisation negatively, and the "spilling-over" of the city is disapproved of. Pall H. Jonsson's *Agnarogn* was written in 1979 when the authorities of Reykjavik had recently claimed a large area of land on the edge of the city for development. The first line of the book states: "They were going to build a house in the neighbourhood. The young people who wanted

to reside there needed a house, and not only one, but many of them” (“Tiny” Jonsson 1979, 6). The little girl asks her grandfather what happens when a house is built and he replies:

– Now we are sitting on the hill, you on that mound and I on this. And here’s the grass, the flowers and all the bush, and you know about the bird’s nest over there. And we see the moor and the mountains and all.

– Yes, I see, said Tiny.

– Indeed. And then they’re going to build a house. Right here they’re going to build a house. . . .

– Yes, look. Suppose they had built the house already. And then we were sitting here – yes, of course, not here because this is where the house will be. But further. Up there.

– Yes, and what then?

– We couldn’t see the moor or the mountains and not a huge, huge part of the sky. . . . and we couldn’t watch the sun come up. . . . We would only see the house.

(Jonsson 1979, 7)

Grandfather tells Tiny that when God had made a large tree, Eva complained that it blocked her view of a rose bush. The Creator told her that she would just have to go on the other side of the tree to see the rose bush. “– You have to learn to look around you, my dear”, he says (Jonsson 1979, 10). The little girl, like some English fantasy writers, should be able to ignore the obnoxious signs of civilisation.

Urbanisation also gets heavily criticized in Illugi Jökulsson’s *Silfurkrossinn*, which starts with the sentence quoted at the beginning of this section: “Where a city will rise, the landscape must die” (“The Silver Cross” Jökulsson 1996, 5). Jökulsson depicts a “living landscape” and says that when rocks are blown up, “the bones of the landscape are broken once and for all” (Jökulsson 1996, 5). The dead landscape is replaced by “unnaturally green grass” that never would have thrived under these conditions, and “foreign trees and fancy flowers” (Jökulsson 1996, 7). Some kind of a spell seems to haunt a house built in this new suburb of Reykjavik. A couple moves in, with their two children, Gunnsi and Magga. With the help of a girl who is a “seer”, they find out why the house is haunted: it is built on a site where monks used to pray before the first Norwegian settlers arrived. “They lived in a quiet and peaceful relationship with the land” (Jökulsson 1996, 59). Urbanisation is spoiling that relationship.

As these samples show, Icelandic children's books writers are just as fond of the countryside setting as their English colleagues. They do not, however, block out all signs of civilization, because progress is admired in Iceland, not despised. The industrial revolution is, in most books, celebrated, not mourned. When the first car comes to the town in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar Strond* ("Childhood's Coast" 1973) it is a riot for the boys to get a ride in it:

It was like a fairy-tale to whiz through town in this magical wonder, which went much faster than the fastest horse on full gallop. We did not realise that we were participants in a remarkable moment: the age of cars had invaded our little, isolated community.

(Saemundsson 1973, 109)

Industrialism is seen positively because it has brought wealth and prosperity to Iceland, facilitated the fishing industry and benefited the farming industry. Some objections to heavy industry have been expressed in the past few years, but they are not noticeable in children's books.

Children's books communicate the nationally accepted landscape tastes, preferences, and landscape aesthetics to the budding generation. But wherever there are preferences, there are rejects. If there is a preference for a rural landscape devoid of any signs of industrialisation, the "rubbish" has to be put somewhere. If there is a preference for beautiful, organised cityscape, the trash must find a place. Children's books teach children to "read" a landscape with rubbish as a bad and ugly landscape. This is noticeable, for example in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*:

The children stood on the slimy shore, and shivered. The air was dank, and the scenery depressing. The dreary waste was encircled by a broken rash of houses, such as may be seen, like a ring of pink scum, on the outskirts of most of our towns and villages to-day.

(Garner 1960, 82)

The picture that is being drawn of the city is surely not attractive, as opposed to the rural idyll surrounding Highmost Redmanhey, the farm-house where the children stay.

Similarly, in *The Song of Pentecost*, the overflowing city drives the mouse Pentecost and

his friends away to hunt for a new place to stay. They meet the Water-vole brothers, who had also thought their existence safe, “But one day, for the voles too, the City spilled over into their lives” (Corbett 1982, 49). Their home becomes a dumping ground for building materials; house bricks kill their parents. Lesley Howarth’s *MapHead* associates ugly birds with the rejects of humanity: “A bunch of ugly white ducks with livid red beak extrusions over their faces hunted scraps by the waste bins. A few peahens hung around the car-park in the petrol-coloured puddles” (Howarth 1995, 55).

To little children, who have not been “taught” that junk is disgusting, a rubbish dump is heaven on earth. The twin brothers of Gudrun Helgadóttir’s *Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni* have, for a while, been dreaming about visiting the Reykjavik city tip because “they had heard that endless treasures were to be found there among the waste” (Helgadóttir 1974, 58). Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni manage to get to the tip by hitching a ride with a stranger, and, when there, they wait at the gate until her car is out of sight. “Then they entered the gates of heaven” – and they spend the afternoon rough-and-tumbling in wasteland (Helgadóttir 1974, 62). A study conducted by Iona and Peter Opie in 1969 shows that children would much rather play on streets and waste lots than in specifically designed playgrounds (Opie and Opie 1969). But most parents want kids to stay away from these dangerous places – they find them awful. Therefore, children’s books, with a few exceptions like *Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni* and Clive King’s *Stig of the Dump* (1963), convey the message that rubbish is the negative side of civilization, which is ruining the natural scenery.

English children’s books tend to illustrate a preference for the quiet, rural idyll against a monstrous and “wild” city image. Icelandic children’s books, on the other hand, highlight the rural landscape as the wilderness, the chaos where anything can happen, against the safety and steadfastness of the city – to which the character happily returns. There is some discrepancy, as in two of the chosen Icelandic books, the city is seen as “overflowing”. In both books, however, the problem is “solved” and the people in question learn to move

around the tree for a complete view of the rose bush. Such an ending is very emblematic of the Icelandic national character, which holds endless optimism for the coming of spring after a long winter.

7.4. Rolling Hills and Rocky Crag

Places, like space and time, are social constructs and have to be
read and understood as such.

(Harvey 1993, 25)

This section centres on the relationship between a nation and its landscape, and how it is dealt with in English and Icelandic literature for children, surveying the cultural implications of particular landscapes and how they have become representative for the nation. It looks at how people observe landscape according to a nationally admitted, albeit unwritten, standard, by which every scene in the world is valued — and by which national landscapes normally rate highest. The national imagination is linked with the local landscape and its peculiarities through memories, myths and meanings. Landscape formulates the national consciousness of the imagination; it enables the imagination to locate itself through a particular physical set of constructs. These constructs, we shall see, are embedded in a nation's literature for children, which reinforces the national paradigm through physical and geographical realities.

In an article called “The Past in Europe's Present,” Brian Graham recalls James S.

Duncan's idea in *The City as Text* of the representative landscape, which he says is

best visualized as a collage encapsulating a people's image of itself. It symbolizes the particularity of territory and a shared past which helps define communal identity, and plays an active part in the reproduction and transformation of any society in time and space.

(Graham 1998, 21)

The idea of “representative landscapes” is fundamental for this part of my discussion. A representative landscape is, for instance, the landscape that comes up in the mind of an Englishman when he or she is abroad and thinking of the homeland. The image in the

mind would undoubtedly be that of the tamed English landscape: green fields and rolling hills because the English tend to idealise the pastoral image, as Michael Bunce illustrates:

The dilution of picturesque and romantic interpretations of nature into popular landscape taste is nowhere more apparent than in England. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the term picturesque had come to apply to settled as much as to wild landscapes. Indeed, the very absence of truly wild landscapes ensured that it would be nature in domesticated settings with which the English would most readily identify.

(Bunce 1994, 28)

According to Martin J. Wiener, the defined and widely accepted ‘English way of life’, “stressed nonindustrial noninnovative and nonmaterial qualities, best encapsulated in rustic imagery” (Wiener 1981, 6). In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama traces this image of the non-industrial rolling hills all the way back to a woodcut by Henry Peacham from 1612:

It is an inventory of the standard features of the humanist happy valley: rolling hills safely grazed by fleecy flocks and cooled by zephyrs moist and sweet. It supplied the prototypical image that was reproduced in countless paintings, engravings, postcards, railway train photographs, and war posters, which merely had to be executed in order to summon up loyalty to the temperate, blessed isle.

(Schama 1995, 11)

Such is the image of pastoral bliss that English soldiers have fought to protect in war after war. Such is the idyllic landscape, the rolling hills, which England’s modern generations know from pastoral novels such as Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), but it needs not be in a particularly “pastoral novel”. Depictions of landscape and rolling hills in English children’s books often hark back to Beecham’s woodcut, for instance in Rumer Godden’s *The Diddakoi* (1972), the story of a Gypsy girl, Kizzy:

The hills ran green and chalky to the horizon, the valley wide below; the village did not nestle in it, but stood up clear and plain, its short street leading to the common where a jumble of cottages edged the green. Miss Brooke’s cottage was the last on the common. The Cuthberts’ new white house stood out at the top of the village street; then came the garage, a market garden, the post office-bakery shop.

(Godden 1972, 12)

Godden’s portrayal of an English landscape could hardly be more “English”: a view of rolling hills and cottages “edging the green”.

English and Icelandic children's books reflect a relationship between culture and place, or what could be termed as the "personalisation" of place. History adds another dimension to this cultural identification with place, so that both myth and memory amalgamate into physical landscape, which then becomes a symbol of national identity. Rob Shields uses the term "imaginative geographies," to explain this, meaning when "sites become associated with particular values, historical events, and feelings" (Shields 1991, 29)

There are particular places in England, such as Stonehenge, which are of obvious archaeological significance, and there are places of historical value, e.g. the Tower of London, but there are also places, like the white cliffs of Dover, which have come to represent the values and feelings of the English nation. Immersed in English history, they are on England's south most coast, which "faces" the rest of the world, they represent the gateway to Europe: on one side is England, on the other, the world. The famous WWII song "There'll Be Bluebirds Over The White

This photograph, which depicts the white cliffs of Dover, has been removed for copyright reasons.

**The White Cliffs of Dover:
England's Gateway to Europe**

Cliffs of Dover", performed by Dame Vera Lynn, epitomized the rebuilding phase of the British people, the hope of a brighter, more promising future for British children. And even white chalk, for all these reasons, has become representative of English national identity.

Michael Morpurgo demonstrates such a notion in *The Butterfly Lion* (1996), a wonderful children's book about a young English boy, Bertie, who grows up in Africa, and at 17 becomes a soldier in the Great War. Bertie had a pet lion as a boy, which was sold to a zoo, to his great distress, but during the war he manages to locate it, just before it is to be

shot. Bertie tells a colonel in France: “A lion, the symbol of Britain, shot! Not at all good for morale, Bertie argued” (Morpurgo 1996, 109). Bernie and his wife bring the white lion home to England, as she tells a young visitor:

“When we docked at Dover, the band was playing and the bunting was out, and there were photographers and newspaper reporters everywhere. The White Prince walked off the ship at Bertie’s side to a hero’s welcome. ‘The British Lion Comes Home’ roared the newspapers the next day.”

(Morpurgo 1996, 110)

The couple take the lion to their home in England and care for it until its death. After the lion has died, Bertie tells his wife: “You know the famous White Horse on the hillside at Uffington, the one they carved out of the chalk a thousand years ago? That horse never died, did it? . . . he’ll be there for ever, and he’ll be white for ever too” (Morpurgo 1996, 115). Bertie decides to carve the image of the lion into the hillside near his home (yet one more victory of man over landscape). The image becomes a symbol which stands for Englishness; the lion — a symbol of England — carved into England’s white chalk — another symbol of Englishness — to remain there always as an icon representing “Forever England”. Like the immortal pastoral paradise, it is a symbolic image, which seemingly has to be kept intact in order for the nation to retain its identity.

Whereas England’s rolling hills have become a national symbol in the minds of the English, Iceland’s rocky crags serve the same purpose for Icelanders. The harsher the landscape, the prouder the Icelander is for having stood up to its challenges. The ideal (and real) Icelandic landscape is also devoid of animals because the stark wilderness is not as friendly to its small inhabitants as the English lushness is to its rabbits and squirrels. Therefore, Icelandic children’s books writers have not created books like *A Wind in the Willows* and *Watership Down* in order to praise an idyllic rural landscape. And although Icelandic children’s books authors are as fond of rural settings as their English colleagues — if not even fonder — they do not write stories about small animals speaking with human voices, but prefer to place young humans against an often hostile landscape. In *Grilladir bananar* (“Barbequed Bananas” 1996), winner of the Icelandic Children’s Book

Award, a group of ten children go on a camping trip with a guide to one of Iceland's most isolated, most obscure places, the rocky coast of Hornstrandir, which is only approachable from the sea. In the fog and the rain, the rocky crags take on supernatural forms that make the children uneasy (Moller 1996, 73). A similar thing happens in Thorgrímur Thrainsson's *Nottin lifnar víð* ("The Night Comes Alive" 1998), which is also about a group of children who go camping, but here in the lava near Snæfellsnes-glacier.¹⁸ The lava hides a lot of caves and other forms that chill the children to the bone. The awe with which the children in both these books regard rock formations — as if they believe they are coming alive — can be traced back to Icelandic myths about elves and trolls living in stones, as discussed in the last chapter. These kinds of myths are remnants from Norse mythology, which has left its legacy with the nation, although Iceland officially converted to Christianity in the year 1000.

Bob Trubshaw claims: "Each culture creates an archetypal landscape myth that in turn shapes the physical landscape" (Trubshaw 2001). The landscape myths that English culture has created to shape its landscapes by, are that of the garden, rolling hills and woodland. Icelandic culture, on the other hand, embraces the valley, enclosed between mountains or glaciers. Both landscapes are tied to national legends and myths. Woods play a significant role in English folklore: they were a refuge which provided shelter against plundering enemies, and they were the place where outlaws could hide – for example the legendary Robin Hood. In bare and almost wood-free Iceland, the valley would play a parallel part: it sheltered people against the proverbial enemy, the ever-raging winds and storms, and it was a place where outlaws could go into hiding – for instance Grettir of *Grettis saga Asmundarsonar*. Frederic Amory points out that one of the strongest folkloric elements in *Grettis saga* is "what we may call the happy-valley legend of Þórisdalr" (Amory 1992, 191). This dream valley between two glaciers "remained forever in the folk imagination of Iceland as the appointed refuge and the ideal home of the outlaw. Hence

¹⁸ Jules Verne (1828-1905) describes the glacier as the entry to the centre of the earth Jules Verne, *Journey*
Footnote continued on next page.

the happy-valley legend is seminal to the storytelling about outlaws in every age of Icelandic history” (Amory 1992, 191). These legendary settings, the wood and the valley, appear as symbolic elements in English and Icelandic children’s literature, and both have gone through a series of changes with increased industrialization and urbanisation, gaining a binary status against the towns and cities of modern culture.

Various images of woods in England, and the association of “good” and “bad” woods, have already been discussed. The valley concept is very strong in Icelandic books for children: in the majority of books in my selection set in the countryside, the farm is located under a high mountain slope, preferably in a narrow valley, and where the action takes place in a village, it almost always nests in a valley. Two of the books chosen centre principally on the valley: Heidur Baldursdottir’s *Alagadalurinn* (“The Enchanted Valley” 1989) and Idunn Steinsdottir’s *Thokugaldur* (“Magic in the Mist” 1996). Baldursdottir’s book is a fantasy, set in an imaginary valley. Although the valley could be located anywhere in the world, or in another world as insinuated by the author, an Icelander could recognize the specialities, the “typicalities” of an Icelandic happy-valley:

The wide valley appeared beneath them, encased by mountains all around. The mountain slopes were wooded down to the lake, which nested in the middle of the valley. On their side of the lake, there were turf-and-stone cottages, grassy fields and meadows separated by stone walls, and here and there flocks of grazing sheep.
(My transl., Baldursdottir 1989, 66)

The turf-and-stone cottages, in which Icelanders lived long after the English had started building rows of brick buildings, make the valley hark to Icelandic-ness, and so does the enclosure by high mountains. The fact that an earthquake shakes the valley some time later, incarnates its location in the Icelandic mind.

The happy-valley legend is epitomized in Idunn Steinsdottir’s *Thokugaldur* (“Magic in the Mist” 1996), set mainly in 1831. The girl in Steinsdottir’s story, Eindis, is supposed to marry a wealthy young man, but accidentally wanders off into a hidden valley:

to the Centre of the Earth, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

She was standing on the edge of a cliff, overlooking a wide valley enclosed on all sides by steep hills and rocky walls. Above, odd peaks rose from the white glacier with an icefall tumbling down into the bottom of the valley. Cascading from the cliffs on the other side of the valley, a waterfall fell into a pool, from which a creek rushed down into the valley to disappear in a lake, where mighty chunks of ice floated about, translucent with the blues and greens of sun rays. Beyond, small rivulets trickled from the lake, winding their way across small ledges, finally plunging into a black ravine. On the hillsides, willow bushes grew like black patches in the cherry-coloured ground. There was no farm to be seen, no sign of humans residing in the valley.

(My transl., Steinsdottir 1996, 26)

Eindis has stumbled upon the happy-valley, which is, like the valley in *Grettis Saga*, enclosed by glaciers. Furthermore, an outlaw couple resides there, in a cave with their young son. They are outlawed because they are brother and sister (but were unaware of it when courting), and for a while they hold Eindis prisoner there, as they are afraid that she would tell on them if she goes back. Eindis manages to escape, only to realise, when she joins humanity, that she is in love with the son. The glacier and the mountains in the distance become a symbol for the valley she knows they enclose. The happy-valley, with its simple life style, becomes opposed to the town life as the future wife of a prominent man. The sympathy of the Icelandic reader lies, as it often does in the sagas and in folk imagination, with the outlaw, and in the end Eindis chooses him and the young outlaw couple elope to Copenhagen.

Like the English, the Icelandic people have particular places that carry an import in terms of national symbolism, of which the national park of Thingvellir would stand as the primary example. Anthony D. Smith claims:

Similarly, attachments to specific stretches of territory, and to certain places within them, have a mythical and subjective quality. It is the attachments and associations, rather than residence in or possession of the land that matters for ethnic identification. It is where we belong. It is also often a sacred land, the land of our forefathers, our lawgivers, our kings and sages, poets and priests, which makes this our homeland. We belong to it, as much as it belongs to us.

(Smith 1991, 22-3)

Nothing would better fit the above for a “sacred land” as the landscape of Thingvellir, or, to be more exact, it is Almannagja — a long crack in the earth at Thingvellir — with grass growing at the bottom of the crack, and one of Iceland’s most beautiful waterfalls

thundering right into it, forming a peaceful pool, from which greenish-blue water flows towards Lake Thingvellir, Iceland's largest lake. Thingvellir has been a theatre for historical scenes since the island's settlement in 874. The Icelandic parliament, "Althing", was founded in Almannagja in 930, and for hundreds of years Icelanders rode in from every part of the country to settle their disputes and exercise the law. This

This photograph, which depicts the Almannagja, Thingvellir, has been removed for copyright reasons.

is also where the Icelanders **Almannagja, Thingvellir:
The Icelandic Parliament met in this crack for centuries** officially converted to Christianity in the year 1000. The Althing meetings were discontinued by the Danish king in 1800, but in 1843, with the awakening of Icelandic nationalism, the Althing was re-established as a consultative body.¹⁹ In 1944, this was naturally the place chosen for the official foundation of the Republic of Iceland. Since then, every major celebration in the history of the Republic has taken place among the rocky crags of Thingvellir. The landscape of Thingvellir is firmly placed in the political and cultural imagination of Icelanders. Anthony D. Smith points out:

The homeland is not just the setting of the national drama, but a major protagonist, and its natural features take on historical significance for the people. So lakes, mountains, rivers and valleys can all be turned into symbols of popular virtues and 'authentic' national experience.

(Smith 1991, 65)

Accordingly, Iceland's most famous poets have eulogized the mountains, lakes and rivers of Thingvellir, and "Öxar vid ána" — a very popular song, which praises the glory of Thingvellir — stirs the Icelandic heart like "The White Cliffs of Dover" does the English. Visiting Thingvellir is a national pastime, and almost as essential on Sundays in summer

¹⁹ Dates are based on website information on the history of Scandinavian countries. Antti Lahelma and Johan Olofsson, *Iceland History: Chronology of Important Dates* (Lysator, Sweden, 2001 [cited 24 November 2001]); available from <http://www.lysator.liu.se/nordic/scn/faq51.html>.

as going to church; it is a “secret” shared space of the Icelandic reality and the Icelandic imagination.

Naturally, Icelandic children’s books writers have not ignored the importance of the place: the children in a number of books either visit Thingvellir with their relatives, mention a visit there, go there camping, or stay in a summer house at Thingvellir. One of the cornerstones of contemporary Icelandic literature for children, *Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni* by Gudrun Helgadóttir (1974), describes a scene where the twins, Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni, go on a camping trip to Thingvellir with their family. Their teenage sister makes a lot of fuss about granny’s ancient tent, but granny says it serves its purpose — she bought it for the Althing centennial celebration at Thingvellir in 1930, “and then things weren’t as crazy as they are now, with no-one showing any respect for anything.” The teenage girl retorts: “Are we now supposed to sing the national anthem and raise the flag?” (Helgadóttir 1974, 29). Her comment goes to show that Icelandic children are very well aware of the connotations between the place, Thingvellir, and national identity.

Places like the white cliffs of Dover and Thingvellir, whether real or imaginary, are referred to as representative landscapes, and they have an important role in the formation and confirmation of national identity. English and Icelandic children’s books writers frequently refer to landscapes that have a emblematic meaning in the national imagination, harking to national history. According to D.W. Meinig, “every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes.” These have an important function: they are part of “the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together” (Meinig 1979, 164). Representative, or symbolic, landscapes are one component of the “homelands” of the mind, which are sanctified because they signify a person’s “roots”. Another component is the *heimat*, which is the word used in Germany and Austria for “homeland”, assigned a slightly different meaning than that of the English word “homeland”. The *heimat*, or the third meaning of “home” is the main subject of the next chapter.

7.5. *Heimat*

But our native country is less an expanse of territory than a substance; it's a rock or a soil or an aridity or a water or a light. It's the place where our dreams materialize; it's through that place that our dreams take on their proper form.
(Bachelard 1942; as quoted in Schama 1995, 244)

Raymond Williams claims that the only landscape he ever sees in his dreams is the Black Mountain village in which he was born. When he goes back to that country, he feels “a recovery of a particular kind of life, which appears, at times, as an inescapable identity, a more positive connection than I have known elsewhere” (Williams 1985, 84). Williams adds that many others feel this way towards their native place, “But the problem has always been, for most people, how to go on living where they are” (Williams 1985, 84). Tony Watkins refers to such an attachment as a “*heimat*” that human beings inevitably strive for (Watkins 1992, 183). In this section I reflect on this idea, that we are part of the landscape of our childhood: only that very landscape and its views and smells, tastes and sounds, or a reproduction of that landscape, will call for the “passionate response” Jill Ker Conway referred to in *The Road from Coorain* (see page 223-4). Because the sensory landscape of childhood is more vibrant, and the experience more deeply burned into the memory than any other landscape, it is the only landscape can reach into us and touch our innermost core.

James S. and Nancy G. Duncan discuss Roland Barthes's notion on the connection between man, childhood memories and landscape in “Ideology and Bliss: Roland Barthes and the Secret Histories of Landscape” (1992). They recall Barthes's claim that he can never know another country like his childhood home, because of the smells and sounds his body experienced there, and add:

(Barthes) can return to the place of childhood only in memory; he can never go there for the first time again. He can never know another country with his body the way he knew Bayonne as a child.

(Duncan and Duncan 1992, 36)

Barthes yearns for that lost landscape, the missing past, for his *heimat*. The *heimat* is hard to get hold of, according to Marshall Berman, “we yearn to grasp it, but it is baseless and

elusive, we look back for something solid to lean on, only to find ourselves embracing ghosts” (Berman 1983, 333). J. Douglas Porteous agrees that the landscape of childhood seems to have a much deeper effect on people than any other landscape in their life. Porteous links this statement with the modern idea that childhood is disappearing, and points out that Graham Greene’s lament for a lost childhood is more common than we might think (Porteous 1990, 147).

I would argue that when authors are writing books for children, they have to turn back in memory to when they were children, in order to invoke the child in themselves and see the world through the eyes of a child. Like Barthes, they cannot go there for the first time again; they have been alienated from their childhood selves. In attempting to return, they may, sometimes unconsciously, be lamenting for that time, for that lost, innocent landscape, which no longer exists anywhere but in the mind – and it may well be somewhat distorted by experience and nostalgia. Samples from Icelandic and English children’s books highlight this lament for a lost childhood and a lost landscape, which is sometimes a physical entity and sometimes just a memory of something indescribable.

Oral historian Ronald Blythe conducted a series of interviews with old people, published in *The View in Winter*, which show that others share Raymond Williams’ feelings, that “it is the actual geography of boyhood and girlhood which the old long for” (Blythe 1981, 57). However, the village, town, or city landscape, will probably have changed considerably during a person’s lifetime. Ronald Blythe comments on the feelings of the old people he interviewed:

They are constant visitors to a vanished geography, whether of village and town, and are at home in gardens under the concrete bus-park and in fields and meadows under runways, or in traffic-less lanes, or in streets with strong identities and familiar passing faces under the office blocks.

(Blythe 1981, 113)

The landscape the old people long to return to no longer exist, or it has changed considerably, but it still lives on in their *paysage intérieur*. An example of this process is to be found, for instance, in Thorvaldur Saemundsson’s partly biographical novel,

Bernskunnar strond, in which he refers to himself as a “boy”, who grew up in a seaside village, but is now, in the prologue to the boy’s story, an older man:

The boy, who long ago moved away from here and now is marked by the years, sometimes revisits these ancient grounds, but he knows hardly any of the people that now are part of the village and are rapidly altering it to suit modern ways. But he feels strongly that this is where his life originated, here lie the roots of his life. He is closely bonded to this familiar environment, to this peculiar beach – a tiny fragment of its rock.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1973, 9)

The boy is not only mentally, but also physically attached to his home village, through the symbolic rock of its beach. He admits, as an older man: “For me, my childhood’s coast is lost – forever” (Saemundsson 1973, 172). At the end of the story, the young boy is leaving his childhood home and wanders along the coast:

I wander through well-known tussocks and hills, cliffs and crags, and the soft white sand, where the footsteps of my childhood are buried. Here I know every mossy grove, every mound, every rock and skerry and lagoon. I feel like I am saying goodbye to and leaving old, dear friends, which have provided shelter for me and protected me through the rain and shine of past days, shared my joys and sorrows, my hopes, longings and dreams, and most of all, the happy games of childhood, which now are behind me, but ineffaceably connected to this coast.

(My transl., Saemundsson 1973, 166)

The boy gives his childhood landscape a long, last, loving look: “I stop on the beach for just a moment while this image is chiselled into my mind. I know that it will follow me to the end of my days” (Saemundsson 1973, 168).

Valny, the young girl of Idunn Steinsdottir’s *Thokugaldur*, also feels her childhood games are part of the landscape, the coast of her childhood:

It felt good to be this close to the sea, to feel its power and breathe its salty breeze. A few yards from the beach a piece of driftwood was tumbling in the waves. Had she been five years younger, she would have strived hard to get it. Dad would perhaps have waded in and attempted to reach it. Or they would have thrown stones beyond it to lure it in.

But she had grown out of playing with Dad and could not allow herself to be fascinated by treasures brought in by the sea.

(My transl., Steinsdottir 1996, 66)

In both of these books, the author, as a child, is saying goodbye to childhood and the vision of childhood landscape as a place to play: the characters are conscious that they are

no longer part of the landscape, they will not see or feel it again through the vibrant, magical senses of a child.

The notion that childhood landscape is “chiselled” into the mind and stays with a person for the rest of his or her life often appears in Icelandic children’s books. Valny, the main character of Idunn Steinsdottir’s *Thokugaldur* (1996), visits a friend who points to the mountains and a glacier in the distance, seen through her window, and asks:

- Do you think it’s possible to stay away from this glacier for long, when you’ve seen it every day of your childhood?
- I’ve never thought about that.
- The glacier will follow me wherever I go. It’s inside me and it will be my final dwelling-place, when the time comes.

(My transl., Steinsdottir 1996, 17)

Valny’s friend can make her ultimate return to her childhood landscape only after death. The idea that one can only return to childhood landscape after death is reflected in two other Icelandic children’s books, Olafur H. Simonarson’s *Gauragangur* (“All Hell Loose” 1988) and Thordur Helgason’s *Tilbuinn undir treverk* (“Ready for Woodwork” 1998). In Simonarson’s book, the young man has a strange experience when he visits an old man, Hreidar, who is dying in a hospital:

Something amazing happened. He was suddenly inside me, inside my body. Or I was inside the body of the old man. I somehow disintegrated and melted into a union with him. And I found that we shared the fear. It was like a heavy stone, crushing our chests. I felt his hand, cold and bony, in mine and I was seeing with his eyes. I felt I was a boy, sitting on the churnstand by the main road, chewing a straw, waiting for the bus; the summer in the country was over. And even if the summer had its ups and downs, many fun things had happened; but now it is autumn, soon the snow will settle on the mountaintops and the meadows will turn pink.

(My transl., Simonarson 1988, 203)

The old man has returned to his childhood landscape through the young man’s body, and he dies content. In Helgason’s book, a farmer named Helgi has been forced to leave his farm and move to Reykjavik. The memory of his horse, Sokki, becomes a symbol for the farm and the farm landscape he misses so much. His colleagues find out where the horse is and decide to chip in to buy the horse from its present owner. The reunion is touching:

[Sokki] runs to Helgi, who drops his cap to the ground and holds out his arms and the horse runs into Helgi’s arms and he puts his arms around the horse’s neck,

who tucks his head into the old man's armpit, and the man puts his head against the horse's cheek and they remain this way for a long time, unmoving, and I suddenly understand that Sokki is telling Helgi what he's been doing all this time, how hard it was for him to get a new owner, and then another, and move west, and then to the south and always miss Helgi and the meadows up north and his friends. And I see that Helgi understands it all and says something that only the two of them understand and the rest of us watch and we know that this is a sacred moment, so we remain quiet.

(My transl., Helgason 1998, 128)

Helgi has found one way to reunite with his treasured landscape, and he can settle for not living in the city, saying: "At least I will be buried up north" (Helgason 1998, 71). His final reunion with the lost landscape is to be buried in it.

English children's books also portray various occurrences of the lament for *heimat*. A sense of loss is often evoked with some sensation: a smell, a touch, or a sound. Alun Howkins quotes" that "Worcestershire lad," Stanley Baldwin, who said in his speech at the annual dinner of the Royal Society of St. George on 6 May, 1924:

To me, England is the country, and the country is England. And when I ask myself what I mean by England when I am abroad, England comes to me through my various senses - through the ear, through the eye and through certain imperishable scents.

(Baldwin 1937, 16; as quoted in Howkins 1986, 82)

Landscape comes to us through the senses, as considered in the last chapter, and the smells, sights and sounds of "home" are irreplaceable. This is, for instance, illustrated in two English children's books, Hugh Scott's *Why Weeps the Brogan?* (1989) and Philip Pullman's *The Subtle Knife* (1997).

Young Saxon in *Why Weeps the Brogan?* (1989), has been buried alive inside the British Museum for more than four years and has seemingly forgotten all about the world outside. She thinks she knows no other landscape, and has no words to depict a scenery of rolling hills or a clear sky, yet the faint smell of dust brings back to her the distant memory of a long-forgotten scene, outside the museum:

But when I smelled the dust it seemed, just for a heartbeat, that it extended far beyond the library, on and on, with a floor that dipped and rose, and the air moved, and the roof spread forever, bright - bright without lights, and no pillars supported it! And colours!

(Scott 1989, 29)

A flash of Saxon's childhood landscape is revealed to her by this sensual stimulus; she longs for a landscape she does not consciously know. Lee Scoresby in *The Subtle Knife*, on the other hand, knows the physical landscape he longs for and is brought to him by the senses, the sound of battle. Scoresby, is running for his life, chased by a flock of enemies, both on land and from the air:

There was a roaring in Lee's ears that had nothing to do with the conflagration in the forest below, or with the labouring drone of the zeppelin trying to rise again. It had to do with his childhood, and the Alamo. How often he and his companions had played that heroic battle, in the ruins of the old fort, taking turns to be Danes and French! His childhood was coming back to him, with a vengeance.

(Pullman 1997, 313)

Pullman demonstrates how a sound can conjure up childhood memories connected with landscape, and these lines also serve to portray that in times of trouble we revert to a distant childhood, when things were different. Even a "bad" childhood comes to the senses and can be relived. Mrs. Jones in Peter Dickinson's *Tulku* (1979) tells Theodore about her childhood in the slum, and her accent changes when her memories go back to the poverty of her childhood.

Pay became *pie*, *with* became *wiv*, *getting* became *ge'in* as she relived that tatterdemalion strange childhood, as full of dangers as the wildest forest, with Saturday night stabbings as common as church-going, and the wheels of the always-drunk carters grinding along the cobbles – a life for the quick and the lucky to escape from and the rest to be submerged like rubbish tossed into the greasy Thames.

(Dickinson 1979, 72)

Mrs. Jones re-enters the body of her childhood and forgets all the years of refining her language and rubbing noses with the rich.

The idea that the thought or the sight of a landscape of the past can restore a person is known from the Romantic period, as for example in William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* ("How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee, / O sylvan Wye," (ll. 55–56). An illustration of this restoration by familiar landscape can be detected in Berlie Doherty's *Granny Was a Buffer Girl*: "Only the marvel of the hills rising behind those derelict homes restored me –

and there is always that marvel in Sheffield, with the promise of other things over in the next valley” (Doherty 1986, 105). MapHead of Lesley Howarth’s *MapHead* (1995) also finds restoration in his “home” landscape. MapHead wants to seek his roots, a place in the world; he is not at ease until he has gone up on Parkway Knoll to find his origin:

Then MapHead saw the place – the very, very place – where lightning had struck his parents, almost thirteen years before. He lay on the spot and absorbed it. When he was good and finished, they toiled to the top together.

(Howarth 1995, 129)

MapHead has realised himself, his identity, through the landscape that initially made him. He has to absorb the exterior landscape, combine it with the myth of his origin (his parents being struck by lightning) and his memories of early childhood, and only then, when the work is “good and finished”, is his identity complete.

As an adult, one can only return to the *heimat* in memory: the childhood landscape is gone. Even though the actual landscape is still there, one can never again “live” the landscape or see it through a child’s eye again: we are, so to say, expatriates from that homeland, the *heimat*. Martin Heidegger discussed in many of his writings the homelessness (“heimlosigkeit”) of man: of being a stranger in one’s homeland and a neighbour to the world dominated by technology. Man must accept this homelessness and find “roots” where he is. Heidegger’s kind of homelessness is beautifully portrayed in George MacDonald’s *At the Back of the North Wind*, first published in 1871. The North Wind tells little Diamond that it is hard for her to take him to the back of the north wind, and the boy cannot understand why it is impossible for her to blow northwards:

“You little silly!” said North Wind. “Don’t you see that if I were to blow northwards I should be South Wind, and that is as much as to say that one person could be two persons?”

“But how can you ever get home at all, then?”

“You are quite right – that is my home, though I never get farther than the outer door. I sit on the doorstep, and hear the voices inside. I am nobody there, Diamond.”

(MacDonald 1871, 102)

The North Wind has accepted the fact that she can never return “home” because then she would be “nobody”. If there was no “north” she would not have an identity, but she has an

identity as the North Wind, and the cost of that identity is the acceptance of no return. We have to sit on the doorstep of “home” and listen to the far voices of childhood. We need a “rebirth” into the present landscape with the aid of the childhood landscape, as portrayed in Peter Dickinson’s *Tulku* (1979).

Theodore, the young man in *Tulku*, has left his childhood landscape, the mission in China where he was brought up. When he has dwelt in a monastery in Tibet for a while, he has a bewildering experience and suddenly gets the feeling that he *has* to return to his room. He stumbles in there, but as soon as he enters, he unwinds, and all the tension flows out of him “through ancient knots and cords that had shaped his nature” (Dickinson 1979, 262). Theodore feels a tremendous relief.

There had been a pool in the ravine in which Father baptized his converts.
Out of a place like that Theodore stepped into the middle of the room, where he
stretched and sighed, as if waking from a dream.
I am re-born, he thought. He said the words aloud.
‘I am re-born’

(Dickinson 1979, 263)

Theodore has managed to shake off his bonds with his childhood landscape, and simultaneously, with his father, each heavy knot and bond, and thus he is re-born into a new landscape. “The whole prodigious landscape centred on this point, this hidden room. Mountain, forest, meadow, the packed maze of the monastery, the Lama Amchi, Mrs Jones – they were all waiting for a birth, and perhaps it would come. But for Theodore it had happened now and here” (Dickinson 1979, 263). Theodore has found a home in the world. Ruth Levitas states: “The quest is for the transcendence of alienation, the overcoming of antagonism between humanity and the world, for feeling at home in the world” (Levitas 1990, 95). She quotes the conclusion from *The Principle of Hope* by Ernst Bloch:

Once [the working, creating human being] has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no-one has yet been: homeland.

(Bloch 1986, 1376; Levitas 1990, 95)

Bloch's hopeful, concluding statement also leads to my conclusion of this chapter on "homeland and *heimat*".

Undoubtedly, there is a strong bond between an individual and the landscapes of his or her childhood. Both Icelandic and English children's books writers express the idea that people belong to the physical landscape of their childhood, that it shaped them and made them what they are for the rest of their life. Iceland is a smaller country than England, and mostly homogenous, so that Icelanders generally expect to be born and die in the "homeland". Icelandic writers who are lamenting a lost landscape are, for the most part, lamenting for a lost childhood. There is normally not much need for a complete "rebirth" into a new landscape – just the acceptance that childhood is a foreign country. England has, on the contrary, increasingly become a multi-cultural nation, the English people are longing for different *heimats*. English children's books reflect the need for rebirth, for an acceptance of the sprouting of new roots – while recognising the importance of the original roots.

The "homeland" is associated with childhood and the extremely perceptive senses of children. Roland Barthes claims: "This is why childhood is the royal road by which we can best understand a country" (Barthes 1987; as quoted in Duncan and Duncan 1992, 36). Children's books allow us a vision of childhood and they are therefore, in a way, a "royal road" to the understanding of a country. As people grow up, they grow away from their childhood, and the homeland often becomes, in the mind, the *heimat*, the place we long for, and we are filled with the desire to look for "roots". Looking for roots is one form of "heritage", which is the subject of the next chapter: the last part of my discussion.

CHAPTER 8

HERITAGE AND HISTORY

If place is socially constructed, so too is the past. History and heritage – that which we opt to select from the past – are used everywhere to shape emblematic place identities and support particular political ideologies.

(Graham 1998B, 21)

During the period covered in this thesis, i.e. the last decades of the twentieth century, the concept of heritage has become more and more culturally, politically and economically activated. Changes in the “world map”, for example the impending amalgamation of Europe, have resulted in an increased attention to “roots” with more and more nations digging into their national heritage. One of the aims of the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht on the 7th February 1992 (an amendment to former treaties, which formally established the European Union) was to generate a common European identity. Nonetheless, the Member States were evidently concerned about not losing their individual identities, as the amendment entailed an insertion into Chapter III:

The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

(Kulturfront 2000, title2.text)

The following lines of the Treaty state that the Community will strive to encourage cooperation between member states, in part by supporting and supplementing improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples. The passage demonstrates that even while Member States of the European Union are attempting to achieve a common European identity, it is an important issue for them to maintain their particular national identities.

This realisation, along with other factors, has hurled a number of European nations on a quest for national identity. Lowenthal states that world changes and fears for the future produce an interest in the past: “In recoiling from grievous loss or fending off a fearsome future, people the world over revert to ancestral legacies” (Lowenthal 1998, xiii). The

quest has driven these nations and groups to dig into the national past – into national history, literature and landscape – in order to unearth cultural treasures, tangible and intangible, that serve as aids in the construction and sustenance of national identity. Meanwhile, the notions of *culture*, *national identity*, *heritage* and *place* have become increasingly popular terms, attracting attention all over the continent: it seems ever more important not to forget the past.

The English and the Icelandic nations have taken an active part in this heritage quest, as the children's books of both nations show. This chapter moves to the last "triangle" in my tessellation presented in the first chapter, which represents heritage and history. The discussion centres on how heritage and history have shaped the national identities of English and Icelandic peoples, continuing with some notions from earlier chapters. Beginning with a section named "The Heritage Crusade", the debate goes on to English and Icelandic particularities, because the emphasis of heritage differs from one country to another. According to David Lowenthal, "Heritage in Britain is said to reflect nostalgia for imperial self esteem and other bygone benisons" (Lowenthal 1998, 5-6). For this reason, Section 8.2. surveys traces of imperialism in English children's books and Section 8.3. reviews how "the North" is represented in them. The Icelandic heritage campaign has centred on the safeguarding of the language, which is discussed in Section 8.4., and the preservation of the sagas, examined in Section 8.5.

8.1. The Heritage Crusade

The term 'heritage' is used to mean both the physical remains of Britain's past and the ideological use of that past in films, television, advertising and other media. The former often extends to the recent past (Paul McCartney's childhood home from the 1990s was acquired by the National Trust in 1998) and the latter has become the basis for Britain's 'heritage industry'.

(Childs and Storry 1999, 250)

In many countries of Europe, the last years have witnessed a number of folk and art festivals, national celebrations, cultural activities, and a notable surge in what David Lowenthal calls "The Heritage Crusade" in his book by the same title, originally published

in 1996 (Lowenthal 1998). In Britain, the heritage movement has certainly escalated for the past few years, and is increasing even after the turn of the Millennium. “The English Heritage website” claims:

- Over 500,000 teachers, pupils and students make pre-booked free visits to our staffed properties each year
- Over 170 resources have been published including books, videos, posters and software, all listed in a free annual Resources catalogue. Merchandise is sold to teachers worldwide by mail order, with an annual turnover of about £80,000
- A free colour magazine for teachers, Heritage Learning, is published three times a year offering ideas to help teachers plan successful projects, along with news of forthcoming courses and new resources.

(Heritage 2000)

Obviously, this is a huge industry, and the children of Britain have by no means escaped the onslaught of the heritage crusade. Apart from visiting castles and monuments with their teachers, children may visit museums, castles and historical sites with their parents. The Icelandic situation is similar: children go to visit historical sites and museums, which are growing in number by the year. At the end of the 20th century, for example, one museum opened in northern Iceland celebrating the Icelanders who moved to Canada at the end of the 19th century, and another one opened in western Iceland, with the theme of “Magic in Icelandic Folktales and Folklore”.

Contemporary English and Icelandic children’s books reflect the heritage crusade: as already referred to in Chapters 3 and 5, a number of English prize-awarded books from the period of 1970 to 1999 look to the past, in one way or the other, in particular to WWII, which seems one of the most popular periods to “revive” in order to summon up national identity. And Icelandic children’s books authors are fond of referring to the sagas or using historical settings or time-travel to evoke interest in a heritage, which many fear is disappearing. In both countries, the stories told in these books have been somewhat manipulated, as David Lowenthal states in his definition of the difference between history and heritage:

In domesticating the past we enlist it for present causes. Legends of origin and endurance, of victory or calamity, project the present back, the past forward; they align us with forebears whose virtues we share and whose vices we shun. We are

apt to call such communion history, but it is actually heritage. The distinction is vital. History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.
(Lowenthal 1998, xv)

Children's books provide the possibility of infusing the past for present purposes. Authors can edit out the indignities and frailties and exalt the national assets, because, as Lowenthal puts it, "heritage is enhanced by erasure" (Lowenthal 1998, 156). Their commitment is to the present, not the past. Indeed, the past can be "interpreted" for the present generation in order to "teach" values, as Anthony D. Smith suggests:

Similarly, 'our past' will teach the present generation not only the virtues of their ancestors but also their immediate duties. It will disclose to the community its true nature, its authentic experience and hidden destiny. From its past the community will discover the inner morality that defines its unique character. Hence the underlying impetus of all these demotic ethnic nationalisms is to discover their communities (even where that means 'inventing' large parts of the 'self') through the uses of landscape and history and the resuscitation of dying customs, rituals and languages.

(Smith 1991, 140)

The various uses of landscape in children's books have been considered in previous chapters, but the main focus of attention here is history and heritage. In the English and Icelandic children's books that look to the past, history is revisited, imbued with human interest, to make it more fascinating than the textbooks children read for school. A great number of children's books elaborate the heritage theme; we are using them — as well as landscape — as a tool to create a link between our children and the past, "lest we forget." David Lowenthal quotes Harold Isaacs to illustrate how eagerly we thrust heritage at children: "Before he can 'know' it, the baby is tagged with labels and enveloped in the past he has inherited. Before he can 'hear' it, he is told the story of his origins. . . . the 'history' of those who have gone before him, the myths to believe about what it all means" (Isaacs 1973, 116; Lowenthal 1998, 57). The question remains: why must we not forget the past?

Perhaps we want to console ourselves and establish our identity within national history by claiming continuity, sustaining the cycle of life. This is the reason why we take children to

historical sites, to the resting-places of our ancestors or the ruins of their homes. Simon Schama says that one of our most powerful yearnings is

the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality. It is why groves of trees, with their annual promise of spring awakening, are thought to be a fitting décor for our earthly remains. So the mystery behind this commonplace turns out to be eloquent on the deepest relationships between natural form and human design.

(Schama 1995, 15)

The intimate relationship between man and landscape goes beyond death, with man's final marking of the landscape: his tombstone. Earlier, I have mentioned that the old farmer in *Tilbuinn undir treverk* ("Ready for Woodwork" Helgason 1998) wants to go back "home" for his final rest. We do not want to be buried under mossy ground with no tombstone: we want to be remembered. Therefore, people take children to see the places of their forefathers, to see monuments and tombstones, as the mother does in Nina Bawden's *The Peppermint Pig* (1975):

That was only their fourth day in Norfolk but they had done so many things it seemed they had been there for weeks. Aunt Sarah had taken them on a tour of the Town, shown them the Assembly Rooms, the wide, paved Market Square, the beautiful church with a roof that was full of flying wooden angels, and the family graves in the churchyard. Mother's parents were buried there, and old Granny Greengrass.

(Bawden 1975, 29)

The theme of history and heritage, man and Nature — including tombstones — is also played upon in Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mister Tom* (1981). Set in England during World War II, it tells the story of a young evacuee who is sent from London to live with an old man in a cottage in the country. The old man's cottage stands on the edge of a cemetery, where his wife and child lie buried. The setting is symbolic: it is a landscape in which the past meets the present to manifest a cycle of life, of continuity, which is confirmed when the old man — having been a bitter recluse for years after his tragic loss — succeeds in adopting the boy. A tombstone is also a relic of the past in Peter Dickinson's *Tulku* (1979). Theodore visits his mother's grave for comfort:

Theodore could barely remember his mother, except as a vague and silent presence, far back. She was more real to him dead than alive, a grave-mound to be mown and weeded, a source of warmth and cheerfulness in Father's voice, a saint known to be at the side of Christ in heaven.

The people that are gone, like past history, tend to be glorified and exalted beyond measure: the tombstone is a public marker for heritage.

Bygone generations lie buried in the landscape under our feet. Characters in children's books are sometimes aware of the bones of their ancestors in the ground under their feet, as, for instance, Jess in *Granny Was a Buffer Girl* (Doherty 1986). Jess likes going up on the Bole Hills, which used to be called "bone hills" because they were built on an old tip, "and when I think I'm standing on the bottles and bones and crumbling waste of long-dead families I feel dizzy, as if this tiny moment of the present and all the moments of my future are slipping away fast from me" (Doherty 1986, 7). Sverni in *Galdrastafir og graen augu* ("Magic Letters and Green Eyes" Palsdottir 1997) walks through a graveyard and gets a shiver down the spine thinking of the bones beneath his feet. He feels, like Jess, that he is amalgamating with history and landscape.

Icelandic children's book writers are very fond of the idea of heritage conveyed through landscape. Kristin Steinsdottir, one of the most prolific Icelandic writers for children, writes about ancestry and heritage in *Vestur í bláinn* ("Westwards into the Blue" 1999). The protagonist, Thora, is a 13-year-old girl. The book begins with a scene set in the eastern part of Iceland, where Thora has gone camping with her father and younger sister. They decide to camp among the ruins of a deserted farm. In the middle of the night, one of the broken walls crumbles and falls down, luckily missing the tent. Thora's father laughs and says, "These old ruins are all alive!" (Steinsdottir 1999, 11). Some time later Thora goes to the Icelandic Museum of Art with her class. She falls asleep in a room in the cellar, and when she wakes up, the others have gone. She enters one of the exhibition halls and finds that the paintings have all come alive — people are stepping out of them. She notices a painting of a girl her age, aboard a ship, longingly watching the craggy coast of Iceland disappear in the distance. The girl asks Thora to join her, and Thora does so, actually stepping into the landscape (or seascape) of the painting. It turns out that the girl

is an emigrant at the end of the 19th century, leaving Iceland with her mother and younger brother, to settle in Canada. Thora travels with her to the new country and stays with her during the first days of the settlement. When Thora returns, stepping out of the painting, she finds that only hours have passed. Later she discovers that the girl in the picture was actually her great-great-great-great-grandmother, of whom she had never heard, who had lived on the deserted farm where Thora camped, and the whole story of the settlement was true. Thora has literally shared history with her ancestors, and thus strengthened the link with her predecessors — with the aid of landscape, and an old chest of drawers in her room, which belonged to her predecessor.

An heirloom, as well as landscape, ties together Thora and her ancestor. David Lowenthal observes that objects, such as heirlooms or amulets, provide a link to the past, linking generation with generation (Lowenthal 1998, 31). This happens, for instance, in Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1973), where the same axe head at the centre of three stories, one set during Roman times, one during the English Civil War and one in the present day – and around the same hill, Mow Cop in Cheshire. The three young men, Macey, Thomas and Tom, do not seem to be connected by family linkage, but the axe head, which ends up in the British Museum, provides a bond between them. An amulet, or a brooch, as well as a name, ties together generations in Gunnhildur Hrolfsdottir's *Her a reiki* ("Spirits in the Air" 1996). Mekkin, called Metta, goes to spend the summer on a farm where her great-great-grandmother used to live. Bad spirits haunt her and make her life on the farm miserable. Another young girl visitor tells Metta that her predecessor, Mekkin, was haunted by the same spirits, but a brooch protected her from them. With great difficulty, Metta manages to find the brooch dug in a hillside near the farm, and it protects her as it did her forebear and namesake.

Hrolfsdottir subtly mocks the heritage crusade in Metta's story. The couple who now own the farm Metta stays on, in a deserted valley, where once a number of people lived, have recently bought it with lofty intentions as Ingi, the farmer, tells Metta:

We signed a contract last year to rent the farm and we have fixed a lot of things and learned about old ways of farming. . . . We are planning to run a bed-and-breakfast. . . . Our dream is that on this place people can work on things the way they used to. Our target group consists of senior citizens, who are not interested in travelling abroad. The fact that traditional ways of farming are disappearing has driven us into action.

(My transl., Hrolfsdottir 1996, 15)

Old people are supposed to pay for the privilege of working as they used to do before the age of technology; the deserted valley can be frozen in time. And the idea turns out to be good: guests keep coming in, including expatriates, a couple from Canada. As mentioned earlier, Geraldine McCaughrean taunts the heritage campaign in *Forever X* (1997), which, incidentally, also portrays a couple who run a bed-and-breakfast. First they had run the place on the “Forever Christmas”-theme celebrating old times, but then they decide to change the theme to “Forever England” because “nostalgia sells these days” (McCaughrean 1997, 106).

Heritage, as David Lowenthal states, brings manifold benefits: “it links us with ancestors and offspring, bonds neighbours and patriots, certifies identity, roots us in time-honoured ways” (Lowenthal 1998, xiii). One form of heritage is that of blood, of lineage, which, according to Lowenthal, is still celebrated in Britain:

It is now proper to disavow lineage as snobbish and exclusive, yet it still confers prestige and privilege. In Britain many callings besides the monarchy – journalism, television, theatre, diplomacy, stockbroking, property development, and, above all, heritage stewardship-are riddled with blood ties. . . . Some will contend that talent is often “in the blood.”

(Lowenthal 1998, 201)

The idea that something is “in the blood” is reflected in several English children’s books. I have already brought to the fore instances where, for example, rabbits should act as rabbits, because they belong to a “flood of rabbitry” and Polar bears should act as bears because that is their nature. Again, English children’s books authors revert to class distinctions: characters feel an affinity with characters of the same kind. William Jones, for instance, the middle-class protagonist of Garfield’s *John Diamond* (1980), discovers an affinity with Mr. Robinson, a young man who mingles with the lower classes, but

apparently comes from another background. William is aware of “a curiously warm feeling between us; a sense of sharing something from which Mr. Jenkins had just been excluded. I suppose it was breeding” (Garfield 1980, 62). As it turns out, Mr Robinson’s father is Mr. Diamond, a former business partner of William’s father.

Lyra, the heroine of Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* (1995) has a vague sense that she is of noble heritage:

[Lyra] was a coarse and greedy little savage, for the most part. But she always had a dim sense that it wasn’t her whole world; that part of her also belonged in the grandeur and ritual of Jordan College; and that somewhere in her life there was a connection with the high world of politics represented by Lord Asriel. All she did with that knowledge was to give herself airs and lord it over the other urchins.
(Pullman 1995, 37)

Father Heyst, one of the scholars at Jordan College asks Lyra if she is not lonely, if she misses the society of other children. She replies that she has Roger. He says: “I don’t mean Roger the Kitchen boy. I mean children such as yourself. Nobly born children” (53). The Master of Jordan College tells her: “You’re not a servant’s child either; we couldn’t put you out to be fostered by a town family. They might have cared for you in some ways, but your needs are different” (Pullman 1995, 70). Later, when Lyra has met the bear Iorek Byrnison, she feels an affinity with him, and is glad to hear that he is born to be a king. “She admired Iorek almost without limit, and she was glad to find confirmation of his nobility” (Pullman 1995, 318). Noble heritage is also important in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Rowling 1997). Harry is born into his “magic heritage” – it is in his blood. Draco Malfoy also says of Harry’s parents: “But they were *our* kind, weren’t they?” (Rowling 1997, 60-61). At another point he tells Harry: “You’ll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don’t want to go making friends with the wrong sort” (Rowling 1997, 81).

“Bad” blood also runs in families. The father in Nina Bawden’s *The Peppermint Pig* has gone to America to find work, and a neighbour, Mrs. Marigold Bugg comments: “I would never have believed James would do such a thing, but I suppose blood will out” (Bawden

1975, 31). The children later find out that his father, their grandfather, had left his wife and children decades ago. Likewise, in Janni Howker's *The Nature of the Beast*, it is insinuated that Billy's restlessness is caused by the fact that his great-great-grandfather, Snowy Coward, a horse-dealer, had a baby with a Gypsy woman, and the Gypsy blood is strong (Howker 1985).

The importance of lineage is even important in children's literature research, as Brian Alderson presumes in his Preface to the third edition of J. Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*:

Kathleen Lines was right too in her perception of the elements that came together to make this such an exceptional book. Most obviously there is Harvey Darton's lineage: great-great-grandson of the founder of an historic children's publishing-house – an inheritance that could not help but give him a sure insight into the commercial decisions that so often determine the character of children's books at any one time.

(Darton 1982)

The question of blood heritage in Iceland is different, and, as in the case of landscape, less class-bound. Andreas Hausler, a traveller to Iceland in the late 19th century, comments on what good heritage means in Icelandic society:

Inherited rights, political privileges, are out of the question with this democratic nation; the term "of good heritage" exists – but good heritage means tracing your family tree to a fine father or forefather, who has done something good for his country: a spiritual aristocracy, which does not lead to any class distinction. Least of all does a person's occupation set class borders. Occupations that are usually worlds apart live together in harmony.

(My transl., as quoted in Finnbogason 1971, 184)

This belief is still dominant in Iceland: there is enormous interest in genes and lineage, but the main aim is to trace one's family tree to a poet, a bishop, or a national hero. There is no aristocracy and no nobility; there is money, of course, but no distinction between "old money" and the newly rich. Diddi, the hero of Karl Helgason's *I pokahorninu* is thrilled to find out that he is related to Iceland's strongest man, Jon Pall, although, according to his great-grandfather, it goes back six or seven generations ("That Extra Something" Helgason 1990, 23). It is, or used to be, a habit in Iceland to question children on their

family tree, people are curious to find out if they are related. Last names do not tell anything, as people go by first names, and even the telephone directory is sorted by first name, not family name.²⁰ When Jens of *Tilbuinn undir treverk* comes to visit his friend, Snorri, the mother wants to know about his family. Just by hearing a few names, she can tell him about his lineage: “Mrs. Finsen tells me that I come from a lineage of priests, which must be positive, and she names a bishop in Holar from the eighteenth century, who supposedly is one of my ancestors” (Helgason 1998, 50).

Heritage is transmitted through landscape, historical interpretations, objects, heirlooms, and a whole lot of other things, including blood. The different *interpretations* of the past are important, and they can be used for various purposes. We “select” from the past, sometimes unknowingly, that which we consider important. England has let go of its former colonies, but traces of imperialism still linger in the national character, which is reflected in children’s books.

8.2. Imperialism Revisited

On one side there is an assembly of relatively naive youth who exalt a glorification of England as they have been taught it by mainly right-wing celebrants, while on the other there are the disaffected young. But could it be that those fleeing from their origins, in a classic expression of *denial*, are active in rejecting English national identity because it cannot measure up to the imperial visions they have inherited, as though to say “If I cannot have Great Britain I don’t want England at all?”

(Easthope 1999, 228)

Anthony Easthope’s contemplations were evoked by a report from 1995, published as *Freedom’s Children*, which Easthope says “supposedly” shows that “Thatcher’s children” take pride in being out of the system and would emigrate if they could (Easthope 1999, 225; Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). The report shows that 56% of 18-24 year olds feel disconnected – while a mere 8% of people over 65 do. Easthope doubts the validity of these statements; the young people could have replied thus because “they had never been

²⁰ Last names are made up of the father’s first name with an added “-son” or “-dottir” (daughter). My last name, for instance, comes from my father’s name, Paul (in Icelandic Pall), plus daughter, Palsdottir, and my Footnote continued on next page.

formally taught the virtues of their nation” (Easthope 1999, 226). “That many of them feel alienated from the official world of Englishness is hardly surprising since it has let many of them down bitterly over the past decade and a half through unemployment and cuts in the welfare state” (Easthope 1999, 228). Until recently, being English had not come much into question at all: there was no need until multiculturalism “threatened” to fracture the perceived solidity of what it is to “be” English. Easthope adds that although young people deny their Englishness, they have been produced in England and will reproduce the inherited English discourse – and they will inherit responsibilities.

Anthony Easthope claims that children need to be “formally taught” the virtues of their nation in order to identify with it. American children are purposely “taught” the virtues of the United States: they sing the national anthem, perform plays from the history of the nation, celebrate the 4th of July, Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, and the flag is waved everywhere. The results of such deliberate education is visible in the score table above (page 172), which shows that 96% of Americans claim to be either quite or very proud of their nation – albeit cultural diversity is very high in the U.S.A. In England, the “teaching” of national virtue is not as deliberate, mainly because both teachers and students feel let down by the English society, as Easthope suggests above. There are, however, silent and inconspicuous reminders everywhere, which people do not notice. Michael Billig notes in *Banal Nationalism*:

In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.

(Billig 1995, 8)

Billig adds that “The unwaved flag, which is so forgettable, is at least as important as the memorable moments of a flag waving” (Billig 1995, 10). I would argue that this “unwaved flag” is planted throughout contemporary English children’s books through the celebration of national virtues, national memories – including “heritage” – and the adherence to

brothers have the last name Palsson.

imperial notions. The flag is “unwaved” because the reminders are woven into children’s fiction which borders on the surreal (e.g. *The Witches*, 1983), animal stories (*Watership Down*, 1972, *The Cry of the Wolf*, 1990), novels set in faraway places (*Tulku*, 1979), historical novels, mainly set during World War II (e.g. *Goodnight Mister Tom*, 1981, and *The Kingdom by the Sea*, 1990) and, in particular, fantasies (e.g. *Northern Lights*, 1995, and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 1997). Hence, although Rudyard Kipling’s books on the glories of empire and Enid Blyton’s books on middle-class children enjoying picnics in the unspoilt countryside of England, seem outdated at the end of the 20th century, imperialism, class hierarchy, idyllic landscape and other forms of “rooted Englishness”, have by no means disappeared from English children’s books: these have merely found other ways of expression.

David Lowenthal claims that heritage in Britain reflects nostalgia for imperial self esteem (Lowenthal 1998, 5-6). Much has been written on postcolonialism and the work of writers from formerly colonized nations. Less has been written on the effects of decolonisation on contemporary works produced by the former colonizer. Anthony Easthope pointed out above that the English continue to repeat Empire through irony, which both recognises it and mourns it (Easthope 1999, 31). The irony, the concurrent mocking and mourning of the former empire shines through *Tulku* (1979), written by Peter Dickinson, who was the son of a colonial servant, born in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), educated at Eton and Cambridge, and served in the British army. The story is set in China and Tibet during the Boxer rebellion.²¹ A young boy, Theodore, is the main character. His father ran a mission in a remote part of China, but the mission is burned down and Theo’s father dies. Theo goes on a journey and meets Mrs. Jones, who had lived with a rich man in England, with whom she went all over the world.

Funny, ain’t it, how a rich Jew-boy, brought up in the middle of London, should want more than anything else to have a great big garden full of foreign plants . . .

²¹ The “Boxer” rebellion draws its name from the defiant Chinese, who excelled at martial arts. In the first months of 1900, they attacked and burned down foreign missions in China.

two years we spent at it, fossicking round after roots and bulbs and things. We done Africa. We done Inja. We done South America.

(Dickinson 1993, 66)

The “mocking” of Empire is that a poor girl from Battersea had joined her lover in practicing a form of colonialism, sampling plants from all over the world, and “doing” whole continents. The “mourning” of Empire lies in the choice of characters and the Oriental setting, harking back to Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (Kipling, 1901). Like Kim, Theo wanders through an exotic yet barren setting, torn between two cultures, as he speaks both English and the local vernacular. The young Theodore fixes Mrs. Jones’ escort, the Asian man Lung, with what Elleke Boehmer calls the “penetrating colonial gaze” (Boehmer 1995, 103). To Theodore, Lung is the “other”, a foreign, effeminate, child-like subject, and he thinks of him:

and his arrival at the guest-house last night, snarling with sulky suspicion. Theodore liked Lung; at the start of the journey he had seemed at least half-absurd, but slowly Theodore had discovered some of what Mrs Jones had seen in him: humour and intelligence, and a kind of exulting innocence which he occasionally let gleam from behind the fastidious façade.

(Dickinson 1979, 157)

Whereas the English Mrs. Jones comes riding into Theodore’s life on “a creature so strikingly noble in its bearing” that it takes Theo a moment to orientate himself, Lung trots in front of the horse with a “neat little embroidered cap” (*ibid*, 20). Lung calls her a “foreign princess”: a status she would never acquire in England (21). Mrs. Jones wants to collect bulbs in the mountains to send to England, thus carrying on an imperial tradition of collecting objects from all over the world to bring to the imperial centre. John Brannigan recalls that Mary Kingsley’s (1862-1900) chief motive in travelling around West Africa was to study and collect observations on the “African form of thought,” adding that

this motive betrays the power relations explicit in her own work, the European subject scrutinising and coming to know the African object. In this relationship, the African always remains the object of study, without sufficient knowledge, intelligence and command of language to be anything but an object, while the European narrator or author displays her/his own mastery in the act of disclosing information, knowledge and interpretation of everything from the dietary habits to the military capacity of the African.

(Brannigan 1998, 135)

Such observation of another nation's culture is also noticeable in other contemporary English children's books which are set in a foreign country. It has struck me in particular how England has been displayed in English children's books as the world's centre, to which other cultures are placed as subordinate. England is placed very firmly at the midpoint of the world, referring to Asian countries as "the East" (or "the Orient"), to America as "the West", to Spain and other sunny countries as "the South" and to an indefinite area north of England as "the North". Part of this conceptualisation comes from the fact that England was a sea-faring nation, and therefore travellers who must be aware of direction for trade purposes – and England perceived of itself as the world's centre. But, more importantly, this construct of centring England in the world of nations has found its way into books. Children's books tend to associate ideas with each of these concepts, e.g. the exotic East, the Wild West, the passionate South and the cold, dark North. A link of associations are tied with each, but I shall focus in the next section on those connected with the North, using examples from English children's books, in order to show how English national identity is defined against this English conceptualisation of "the North".

8.3. "The North" in English Children's books

For some people, when you say "Timbuktu" it is like the end of the world, but that is not true. I am from Timbuktu, and I can tell you we are right at the heart of the world.²²

Ali Farka Toure

As this thesis surveys how national identity is reflected in English and Icelandic children's books and constructed through these, it is of particular interest to examine how the North is displayed in English children's books – considering that, from an English viewpoint, Iceland belongs to "the North".

Edward Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* (Said 1985) offers a fundamental insight into spatial connotations from a European – and particularly English – point of view. Said claims that "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a

place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1985, 1). He adds that “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture” (Said 1985, 1-2). Said brings attention to the fact the before “the Orient” was “discovered”, Europe had nothing to contrast with. After the Orient was “found”, Europe became the “Occident”, as he calls it. Said comments:

I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not there either. We must take seriously Vico’s great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.

(Said 1985, 4-5)

Having acquired all these connotations as a place of romance, mysteriousness and quaint landscapes, the Orient as such became a popular setting for a number of books, including Kipling’s *Kim* (Kipling 1901) and Forster’s *A Passage to India* (Forster 1924). Both Kipling and Forster had lived in India and both books deal with the notion of being caught between two cultures.

The English concept of “the North”, I would suggest, has developed among similar lines as “the Orient”, placing England at the Imperial centre. Said’s comments about the Orient not merely being *there*, could as well be applied to the North, which has been bestowed with a number of connotations, especially so in children’s books.

The English passion for exploration of the unknown and dangerous territory of the North is recollected by Jeannette Mirsky in her book from 1934, *To the Arctic!* (Mirsky 1970). In the beginning of Arctic explorations, men went to the North very reluctantly, to find a route to the East. The idea of the awe-inspiring North seems to derive from their tales of

²² Ali Farka Toure, sleeve notes, Talking Timbuktu, World Circuit Records, 1994.

its darkness, cold and harshness. Mirsky writes that men would only undertake Arctic voyages in the period just following the discovery of the New World if they had a very strong motive:

Men were as fearful of the dangers of the Arctic as they were of the terrors of hell. They dreaded its terrible ice and its terrifying darkness. They ventured within the Arctic only in the hope of finding there a short, direct route to the Spice Islands of the East. . . . This initial phase had two results: the wealth of the north was noted and exploited, and the romantic strangeness of its regions was broadcast.

(Mirsky 1970, 9)

And the image of the Arctic was firmly set. It had, like the Orient, been “discovered” by European explorers, who gradually came to refer to it as “the North”. Like travellers to the Orient, arctic explorers returned with both material riches and colourful tales of the North that stirred the English imagination. Mirsky points out: “It is little wonder that the north was to have such a hold upon the imagination of the English — they who fed and grew upon its bounty” (Mirsky 1970, 10-11). She refers to the Arctic regions as “the attic of the world” (*ibid*, 13).

The secrets kept in the attic of the world were waiting to be “discovered”. And much like Charlotte Brontë’s madwoman in the attic, the North was assigned qualities by the observers – especially by children’s authors – which it did not possess. Ever since H.C. Andersen’s fairy tale “The Snow Queen” (1844) – who abducts young Kay and carries him to her cold castle in the north – appeared in print, English children’s books writers have assigned evil: witches, death, destruction, to the North. In the 19th century’s tale, *At the Back of the North Wind* George MacDonald’s uses the undefined image of “North” to give a sense of place to that which has no place (MacDonald, 1870). The North Wind, kind as she is to Diamond, brings death. Although MacDonald is assigning a landscape to the abstract, he plays on the idea of the North as a place, with other English conceptualisations attached.

Almost a century later, the children in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, first published in 1950, find Narnia under the spell of the evil White Witch who has this

land covered with snow and ice: she has turned it into a hellish place. When the four children put on heavy fur coats for their trip through the wardrobe, Lucy says: “We can pretend we are Arctic explorers” (Lewis 1950, 53). Later, when the children have become the two Kings and two Queens of Narnia, “they drove back the fierce giants . . . in the north of Narnia when these ventured across the frontier” (Lewis 1950, 168). The land north of Narnia is the evil North.

Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, first published in 1960, also presents the North as a source of death and destruction. The clouds in the north of Cheshire mean that “Fimbulwinter” is approaching (Garner 1960, 156). Fenrir comes upon the children from the north as a wolf head in the sky, with hungry, yellow eyes and a huge mouth. When the children come out of the fir plantation, they see all of the sky:

The blue sky and brilliant sun had vanished. From horizon to horizon the air was black and yellow with unbroken clouds, like monstrous, bloated, land-locked seals, bad-tempered and complaining, whose swollen weight seemed scarce able to clear the tree-tops as they humped and rolled before the raucous thunder of the seal-herding, north-wild wind.

(Garner 1960, 176)

The “north-wild wind” is a precursor of Ragnarok, and after the destruct, the snowy ground is “as empty of life as a polar shore” (Garner 1974, 224). The North can also, in the case of England, stand for Scotland; and the implication of evil from the North could derive from the past when the rebellious Scots could unexpectedly flock in from the North and attack England. The North could also signify Iceland or Norway, where Vikings came from to raid England, which is, for example, reflected in Roald Dahl’s *The Witches*, suggesting that all witches originate in Norway (Dahl 1983). Here, however, the North is understood to pose an allegory of dangerous and unknown territory, similar to the “Orient”. Elleke Boehmer points out:

Yet, even if their occurrence was purely incidental or ornamental, exotic objects in circulation in novels—and also characters with colonial connections—carried associations of either the fascination or the fear of the forbidden.

(Boehmer 1995, 27)

The “role” of the English is to explore and “map” the unknown territory and bring back souvenirs as tokens of their knowledge. The British Museum in London becomes a centre where the public can view those trophies.

Hugh Scott’s *Why Weeps the Brogan?* is set in the British Museum in a post-holocaust London, where two children, Saxon and Gilbert, go on expeditions within the museum. In a division called ETHNOGRAPHY, the children pass the armour of a Samurai, and then “plastic eskimoes naked in a shattered case; Saxon and Gilbert were wearing their clothes” (Scott 1989, 46). Dressed as Arctic explorers and armed with Eskimo spears, they roam the museum, killing spiders and facing unknown dangers. In a “new world” of their own, they continue the imperial tradition, surrounded by literal artefacts which serve as trophies from their nation’s history.

The North is used as an allegory for the imagination in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997). When young Harry Potter has received his summons to go to study at the Hogwarts School of Magic, he takes a train and moves from the lush English landscape into the darkness and the cold of the North:

The countryside now flying past the window was becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there were woods, twisting rivers and dark green hills. . . . Harry peered out of the window. It was getting dark. He could see mountains and forests under a deep purple sky.

(Rowling 1997, 78, 83)

When November comes to Hogwarts School, the weather turns very cold: “The mountains around the school became icy grey and the lake like chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost” (Rowling 1997, 133). Magic seems more at home in the cold, barren and “unknown” landscape of the North.

The North as an image has its climax in Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* (Pullman 1995; 1997). Mrs. Coulter, Lyra’s mother, Lord Asriel, Lyra’s father, and John Parry, Will’s father, have travelled all over the world, especially to the Arctic, to observe other cultures and collect objects (Pullman 1995). John Faa, a gyptian leader, says

the “child-thieves” are taking the children “to a town in the far North, way up in the land of the dark” (Pullman 1995, 116). Lyra ends up going to Norway, and as she approaches the harbour, she smells “the North”:

The smell was of fish, but mixed with it came land-smells too: pine resin and earth and something animal and musky, and something else that was cold and blank and wild: it might have been snow. It was the smell of the North.

(Pullman 1995, 168)

Strangely, “the North” does not conceive of itself as being “the North” with its own smell and a doubtful character. Because Pullman refers to the northern part of Norway as “the North”, I sought an English-Norwegian dictionary — which translates “the North” into Norwegian merely as “the northern part of England”. Even my English-Icelandic dictionary defines the term as relating to the northern part of the United States, or the part of England that lies north of Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Cheshire. According to these dictionaries, there is no such thing as “the North” up in the Arctic. It is an imaginary, allegorical term.

Rob Shields examines how writers use spatial and geographical metaphors to describe a state of mind (e.g. “the Far East” and “Darkest Africa”) in *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (Shields 1991). He points out that the North, in Canada, for example, “is not *just* north but a zone of the social imaginary: an unconquerable wilderness and zone of white purity” (Shields 1991, 30). Shields quotes A. S. Bailly, who comments:

Contrary to what is often stated, studies on representations do not focus on the particular characteristics of images, but show instead that a place is nothing by itself, but depends on other places and practices to imbue it with meaning,

(Bailly 1986, 83; Shields 1991, 30)

English children’s books authors have developed a tradition of imbuing “the North” with meaning in order to define and fortify “the English character” against this image. Children are not cut away from their dæmons in England: this happens in the unforeseeable North. Little children are generally not turned into mice in England, but in Norway, where anything can happen. In Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* (1983), Mr Jenkins, Bruno’s father, is

furious after Bruno has been turned into a mouse. The Norwegian grandmother soothes him:

‘I can very well understand your anger, Mr Jenkins,’ she said. ‘Any other English father would be just as cross as you are. But over in Norway where I come from, we are quite used to these sort of happenings. We have learnt to accept them as part of everyday life.’

(Dahl 1983, 180)

Although Dahl is of Norwegian origin, he writes into the English tradition of displaying the incredibility of the North.

The North as a place in the English “world view” is reflected in English children’s books as a place where the end of the world “begins”: the origins of Ragnarok reside in the cold and darkness of an imaginative North, which seems to hover somewhere on and beyond the Arctic circle. In Philip Pullmans “His Dark Materials” trilogy, the great war – Lord Asriel’s war against the Authority, with the aid of rebellious angels – is fought in the North. Quite contrary to the concept of the North, Simon Schama reveals that the New World came to be, for the English Puritan settlers, a kind of Eden:

But the exploration of the New World, with the discovery of a marvellous range of hitherto unknown species, had created a rich new topography of paradise. Eden, it was speculated, not least by Columbus himself, might be in the Southern Hemisphere.

(Schama 1995, 537)

Eden, as pictured in the imagination, is a lush, warm garden, ripe with fruit, where Man and Woman can reside, needing nothing except what Nature provides. The North, on the other hand, would polarise Eden: as a place where one needs fur clothing to keep warm, where one must kill seals, bears and reindeer for food, and Nature provides nothing except endless ice, snow, and gloomy darkness.

Philip Pullman’s Dark Materials trilogy is an outstanding example of the mourning of empire, of the revival of imperialism and colonialism, Englishness, and the concept of the North as an opposition to Eden. The name of the trilogy is based on a quotation from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (“Unless the almighty maker them ordain // His dark materials to create more worlds”, in Book II), and all three books allude to Milton’s poem in numerous

ways. Anthony Easthope calls Milton's *Paradise Lost* "a foundational text for Englishness", and comments:

I surmise that English empiricist discourse maintains itself on the back of a metaphysical opposition between the real and the apparent reproduced and reworked in many directions: objective/subjective; concrete/abstract; in practice/in theory; clear/obscure; serious/silly; common sense/dogma; sincere/artificial; and amateur/professional.

(Easthope 1995, 153)

I would add Arctic/North as one more metaphysical opposition: the Arctic as real and the North as a reproduced and reworked concept. Pullman's trilogy abounds with such oppositional concepts, representative of an English empiricist discourse. The first chapters of *Northern Lights* (1995) are set in the very centre of Englishness, metropolitan Oxford, in a male-dominated college. Jordan College is the core for research in the North, and Lord Asriel has to depend on it for financing his expeditions. At the end of the first book, Lord Asriel epitomizes the English position by "walking into the sky" in order to found a new Eden. Icelanders, on the contrary, would not cherish the idea of founding a new Eden except if they had nowhere to go. They would travel off to make a new place for their family only on the basis that their world had been totally destroyed and they could not re-make it.²³ Finally, the North is the place where the ultimate war between the worlds is fought in the last book of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* (Pullman 2001). Pullman brings the polarities of Eden and the North to a culminating Ragnarok, where the destiny of the world depends on two English children, Lyra – the new Eve – and Will. The concept of Ragnarok is well-known in Icelandic literature and especially the sagas, and the next two sections examine the Icelandic heritage: language and the sagas.

8.4. The Living Language

The Icelandic nation's most valued heritage "items" are its language and its sagas. These precious items are interrelated: the sagas, mostly written around the twelfth century and

²³ This disposition is reflected, for example, in *Vestur í bláinn* ("Westwards Into the Blue" Steinsdóttir 1999), which tells the story of Icelanders who left their country for Canada with a sinking heart, after their livelihood had been terminated by a series of volcanic eruptions at the end of the 19th century.

preserved in manuscripts throughout the ages, have preserved the Icelandic language on paper in its original form. The protection and glorification of these two main national treasures epitomizes the heritage crusade in Iceland. Whereas this section centres on the preservation of the language the next section reviews the importance of the sagas for Icelandic heritage.

Gisli Sigurdsson states that the interaction between the *land*, the *nation* and the *language* produces the foundation for Icelandic national identity (Sigurdsson 1996, 46). These were the “weapons” which the Icelandic Romantics used to demand freedom from the Danish rule, and therefore they have acquired an elevated status. I consider it relevant to consider briefly the history of the Icelandic language, comparing it with the Norwegian situation – because at one time the two nations spoke the same language – in order to clarify the importance of its safeguarding.

The Norwegians are one of the nations that have experienced conflict concerning language. They lost their independence in the 15th century and became part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Danish became the language of the cultured people in Norway and gradually the language changed into a mixture of both, now called Bokmål (formerly Riksmål, “the language of the nation”). At the present, the nation has mainly two languages: *Bokmål* (the old Danish-Norwegian language) and *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian, created out of the rural dialects over a century ago). Norwegian governments have tried hard to find a common language, but their efforts have been in vain. I have dwelt on the Norwegian situation because it shows what could have happened to the Icelandic language had it not been so well preserved. The first Icelandic settlers, farmers who fled from the monarchy in Norway, spoke their native Norwegian language, now known as Old Norse, which is almost identical to the Icelandic language spoken today. Iceland submitted to the King of Norway in the 13th century and when Norway and Denmark formed the Kalmar Union in 1397, Iceland fell under the sovereignty of the King of Denmark. As the centuries wore on, Icelanders in the service of the Danish king, officials and merchants,

and Icelanders who had been educated in Denmark, started to speak a combination of Icelandic and Danish. By the middle of the 19th century the language of the rich and educated was a strange mixture of the two languages. Still, the public stubbornly resisted any changes in their mode of expression.

The language that the common people had doggedly preserved throughout the middle ages became at the end of the nineteenth century the language of nationalism and Romanticism; Iceland's heroes of independence started publishing poems and articles in the "pure" Icelandic language. Terry Lacy explains: "The Romantic and nationalistic movements of the nineteenth century encouraged linguistic 'purism' and admiration of the speech of the common people as the 'purest'" (Lacy 1998, 27). This is no unique phenomenon, as Gerry Smyth points out: "Cultural discourse, to adapt Foucault, is the power which is to be seized, and the seizure and redeployment of language and literature have historically constituted an indispensable tactic in any decolonising narrative" (Smyth 1995, 8). Accordingly, the Icelandic nationalists wanted to retrieve the Icelandic manuscripts of the sagas, which had been stored in Copenhagen for centuries (as discussed in Chapter 3), and revive the language. Claudio Guillén illuminates the importance of national literature for the nationalistic movement:

Little by little, the ideas of nation, state, country, national idiom, and national culture would tend to converge. This voracious modern nationalism required a considerable effort of integration, to which a patriotic conception of literature would make a significant contribution, although often a single great poet was the focus of attention.

(Guillén 1993, 26)

A single great poet signifies the Icelandic national movement in Iceland: Jonas Hallgrímsson, born in 1807, who wrote beautiful poems in the nineteenth century about Icelandic nature. Hallgrímsson is known to every Icelandic schoolchild: they have to learn several of his poems by heart. There is, for instance, no need for Guðmundur Ólafsson, the writer of *Heljarstokk afturabak* ("A Backwards Somersault" 1998) to mention the "co-incidence" that Jonas Hallgrímsson, the hero's best friend, is a budding poet: the Icelandic reader suspects it. Ormur, the hero of Ólafur H. Simonarson's *Gauragangur* ("All Hell

Loose” 1988), is a budding poet, too, but worries that he will never be discovered. He visualises an article about himself in a national newspaper: “Ormur followed in the footsteps of Jonas Hallgrímsson and died young. Both were national poets, but neither one of them was recognized as such until after they had passed away” (Simonarson 1988, 16).

Long after the Icelandic nation acquired its independence, the preservation of the Icelandic language is still an important issue. Terry Lacy observes that many Icelanders believe that the language “must be carefully nurtured, like a plant, by stressing correct usage and the formation of new words from Icelandic roots” (Lacy 1998, 28). With increased globalisation, the 1990s found a great upsurge in language awareness in Iceland by the upholding of what has been commonly referred to as *hreintungustefna* (“pure-language crusade”). The nation’s main milk company launched a campaign for the improvement of Icelandic, titled “Icelandic is our Language,” which included subsidising the Icelandic Language Institute and printing guidelines for vocabulary improvement on milk cartons. Since 1996 “The Day of the Icelandic Language” has been celebrated yearly on the 16th of November, the birthday of the National Poet, Jonas Hallgrímsson. Moreover, there are regular daily spots on the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service’s programme called *Íslenskt mál* (“The Icelandic Language”), and a weekly column with the same title in the nation’s largest newspaper. In debates about the language, the term “purity” is often used, and has not been associated with ethnicity or regional differences, but to keep the language of the sagas – Iceland’s most precious asset – alive.

It has been hard for the Icelandic nation to safeguard the Icelandic language against the “onslaught” of English. After the “threat” of Danish influences had ceased, World War II and the British invasion brought a new menace to the preservation of language. In 1940, at the time of the British occupation, the total population of Iceland was about 120,000, of which 40,000 lived in Reykjavík. In 1941, when the occupation reached its peak, there were around 25,000 British soldiers in the country, most of them located in the Reykjavík area. Their presence made a tremendous impact on the city life, particularly as a large

number of Icelanders were employed by the British. A new surge of nationalism emerged: the Icelanders fought to keep the language “untainted” by the foreign influence. Andres Indridason’s *Manndomur* (“Manhood”), set during WWII, symbolises the peril of the language by having British soldiers march through the city centre, by the statue of the national poet:

These fine-looking regiments now turned into Laekjar-street and dissipated right in front of Jonas Hallgrimsson, who stood erect on his platform in front of the pile of sandbags by Amtmanns-lane. I’m sure I saw him trying to give them a smile.
(My transl., Indridason 1990, 48)

Shortly after WWII, Snorri Hjartarson wrote a poem in, as Gisli Sigurdsson calls it, the “nationalistic and romantic spirit,” which re-invoked the trinity of “land, nation and language” (Sigurdsson 1996, 46). The poem has been quoted very often in political debate, the president’s speeches, and in newspaper articles, and the trinity is known to most members of the Icelandic nation. The pop-culture of the 1960s and 1970s again threatened the conservation of the Icelandic language, and the older generation worried about Icelandic teenagers adopting English songs and lyrics. Furthermore, the constant presence of the U.S. airbase at Keflavik, which broadcasted radio from 1951 and television from 1961 in English, were a worry to the preservationists, who did their utmost to have the broadcasting banned outside the base. The appearance of the National Broadcasting Service’s Icelandic TV in 1966 led to the gradual disappearance of the American TV. However, a large percentage of entertainment programmes on Icelandic television are in other languages, mainly English, and this fact is still a matter of worry for conservationists. Strict rules apply: every foreign programme broadcast in Iceland must have Icelandic subtitles.

Icelandic writers for children have a concern which they do not share with their British colleagues: the bulk of translated children’s books published each year. Sigrun Klara Hannesdottir notes that 86 translated children’s books were published in 1990 and 81 in 1998 (Hannesdottir 2000, 213). This means that around 60% of the total published fiction for children consists of translations. Translated books, therefore, mostly from the other

European countries (and the highest percentage from England) dominate the Icelandic children's books market. In England, however, the situation is reversed. Klaus Flugge of Andersen Press discusses the proportion of translated books in the English market in his 1994 Woodfield Lecture, saying that, as an example, his company publishes only 1 or 2 translated titles out of at least 40 titles a year (Flugge 1994, 209). If this figure can be taken as representative for the English market (considering, too, that Flugge has struggled to publish translated books), its contrast to Iceland's 60% is certainly striking. Flugge attempts to encourage his fellow English publishers to look towards the European market for titles instead of taking it for granted that other European countries flock to ensure publication rights for English children's books.

At the same time, Icelandic children's books writers, and some publishers, are striving to decrease the percentage of translated books on the Icelandic market and endeavouring to have Icelandic books translated into other languages. Some of them have been successfully translated into Scandinavian languages and occasional ones into German and Dutch, but it has been almost impossible to find English publishers for Icelandic children's books. I will not dwell on this subject, but mention it here because I consider it important for my discussion on national identity and the question of Englishness and being Icelandic.

Considering that language is one of the most important elements of Icelandic national identity, the importance of the book, the printed language, is obvious. Therefore, Icelandic children's books authors are under much pressure to use a rich vocabulary and, of course, be grammatically correct – because deviations from a grammatical rule are called a “sickness”. Although a large number of children in Iceland suffer from “dative sickness,” a writer must never let a character use the dative incorrectly: the editor will take care of that. If a character does, another character invariably corrects him or her. It borders on being anti-national to use slang or incorrect language when you are a member of a nation which shows its affection for the land by preserving and cherishing the language of its

forefathers. In Icelandic children's books, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and mainly grandparents, correct children's speech. This happens, for instance, in Larus Mar Bjornsson's *K/K: Keflavikurdagar/Keflavikurnaetur* where the young man, living near the NATO base in Keflavik, uses a lot of slang words adopted from English:

Granny wanted me to talk properly. The cultural heritage, granny said. It sometimes irritated me to be corrected by her, although she did it neither with magic nor malice, but with humorous eyes and a friendly smile. The national heritage, granny said.

(My transl. Bjornsson 1995, 21)

The younger generation in Iceland is actively involved in maintaining the national heritage, and every child of school age has learnt to sing Thorarinn Eldjarn's "The Icelandic Poem", which emphasises the "purity" of language and the idea that the language has to be "guarded" against threatening forces. It is in the hands of the Icelandic people, of all ages and all classes, to "nurture" their "mother tongue".

As less than three hundred thousand people speak Icelandic, an Icelander is delighted to meet a foreigner who knows the language. It is difficult to learn and foreigners find it hard to use the right inclinations, so Icelanders generally bear with them and often find it "charming" to hear a foreign accent. For instance, Gabriel, the main character of Thorgrimur Thrainsson's *Nottin lifnar vid* (1998) is fascinated by Manuela, a French girl, and her broken Icelandic. Because of the lack of Icelandic-speaking people in the world, the Icelanders have to learn foreign languages from an early age, generally starting with Danish at age 11. To name an example, I had, before entering University, eight years of Danish, seven of English, three of German, two of French, and one of Latin. Icelanders have come to revere foreign-language speakers, and their "different" ways of expression. For instance, when the two young brothers of Davidsdottir's *Silfur Egils* are with their parents in Paris, they see two Frenchmen who have had a collision with their cars. The Frenchmen wave their hands in a passionate debate, pointing at the cars. "Mother had told them that Mediterranean people often use their hands as signifiers when speaking. Some of the signs were rude and abusive and therefore more expressive than words"

(Davidsdottir 1989, 22). She is impressed with their heated discussion, especially when they start cursing each other's relatives, and she tells the boys:

“Much more effective than saying something limp like you fool or you idiot. Actually, these are just phrases, although they sound powerful. But this is very healthy. They get into a heated argument and find an outlet for their anger, and a moment later everything has returned to normal. Much healthier than just grinding your teeth, like we do.”

(My transl., Davidsdottir 1989, 23)

The boys' mother actually expresses what some have called the Icelanders' “minority complex”: an admiration for the ways of other nations followed by a momentary reflection on “our” unpolished ways.

English people are not as much pressed as the Icelanders to study a foreign language. Anthony Easthope points out that at the present day, “one in five of the world's population can speak Modern English” (Easthope 1999, 26). The number of those who can understand the language, or have some knowledge of it, would raise the proportion considerably: an English person can travel around the world with the safe assurance that most people can communicate with him or her.

The assurance of the English that even in Wales all people should talk their language is portrayed in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. Roger, the young English boy enters a shop where the shopkeeper is talking Welsh to the other customers. He is offended: “‘You know, it's darned rude of them, speaking Welsh like that,’ said Roger. ‘How would they have liked it if we'd started up in French?’” (Garner 1967, 43). The same assurance is also reflected in other English children's books, albeit less obviously. When Lyra, the young protagonist of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995), meets Iorek, a talking polar bear from the island of Svalbard, north of Norway, he, of course, speaks English. There is no need to ask him if he does: his first utterance is in Modern English, no explanations needed.

Modern-day English school children are not exposed to a “purity of language” campaign the way that Icelandic children are. No official crusade has recently been run in England to keep the language “clean”: such endeavours belong to the past. Brian Doyle considers a language-cleansing action intended by the English Association in the early 20th century which, he says, quoting from its aims, “was set up to promote the maintenance of ‘correct use of English, spoken and written’” (Doyle 1989, 31; Smith 1942, 4). Doyle adds that

English literature was seen by members of the Association as the most effective vehicle for establishing through elementary education acceptable standards of linguistic usage. The goal was to implant ‘standard’ English forms (linguistic and cultural) by inculcating a ‘love’ of literature.

(Doyle 1989, 37; quotes from Bulletin 7 February 1909)

Other similar associations were established, as Philip Dodd illustrates, quoting a text from “The Society of Pure English”, founded in 1913, which condemns how people of other nations learn enough English to imitate it, establishing “all kinds of blundering corruptions” (Dodd 1986, 15).

English children are taught to use some of the main features of spoken Standard English, according to the National curriculum, but training oneself to speak Standard English is not commonly considered to be an “improvement” – because such a choice of words implies that local dialects are somehow lesser than Standard English. It surprised me to see an advertisement in May 2001 in “Night and Day” – the weekend edition of the *Mail on Sunday*, an English newspaper (13 May 2001, p. 29). The main caption read: “Improve your Accent” – and I believed to have finally found that the English public does not always think negatively of achieving a “higher” standard of language. This was, as it turned out, an advertisement for Siemens mobile phones which enable you to get foreign language courses through text messages. Improving one’s French or Italian accent is all right, but, contrary to the situation in Iceland, where children, and the public in general, are encouraged to “improve” their Icelandic, the English public is generally not encouraged to speak “better” English (except, of course, that the National Curriculum emphasizes the use of Standard English).

I found in two of the English children's books covered here examples of young people's attempts to speak "better" English – one is an alien and the other a Welshman. Powers, the alien father of MapHead in Lesley Howarth's *MapHead* is trying to get MapHead to speak good English in order to be less noticeable: "'Where's your speech rhythms?' asked Powers sternly. 'You should make it flow. Make it more natural'" (Howarth 1995, 8-9). The Welsh boy, Gwyn, in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* is forbidden by his mother to speak Welsh and he has been teaching himself to talk better English from a record, "to speak properly. That's what matters" (Garner 1967, 18, 103). However, Roger the middle-class English boy, finds his attempts pathetic and Gwyn admits "I'm a Taff, aren't I?" (Garner 1967, 103).

8.5. The Saga Continues

The Icelandic manuscripts are a national treasure, one of the major reasons why this tiny North Atlantic nation can pride itself on a significant culture, and a long and continuous history.

<http://www.icelandtotal.com>

Iceland's most precious treasures – the manuscripts of the sagas and Eddas, from as far back as the 12th century – were moved to Copenhagen during the years of Danish rule and stored there. The retrieval of the manuscripts, a battle which took about a century, was one of the greatest concerns in Iceland's fight for independence. Although Iceland declared its independence in 1944, the return of the manuscripts was delayed until 1965.

The sagas, tales of Icelandic national heroes that took place in Icelandic landscape, written mainly in the twelfth century, conserved in these manuscripts, have throughout the centuries had their place in the national consciousness, and, as Gisli Sigurdsson points out earlier, these three elements, the *language*, the *literature*, and the *land*, became the foundation for a new national identity – which inspired the people to resist the Danish rule:

That is how the Icelandic language, Icelandic history preserved in literary sources, and the country of Iceland itself became the most important factors in the development of Icelandic national identity in the present century.

(Sigurdsson 1996, 46)

The peasants, the common people, were the heroes of nationalism in Iceland, and have, since then, been associated with “Icelandic-ness”. The conquest of achieving sovereignty in 1918 was celebrated by the common people: this was their victory, and their gratitude turned towards the poets and writers who had made this possible. Kristjan Arnason also underscores the importance of the sagas in the formation and maintenance of the Icelandic language in an article “The Land, the Nation, the Language – and the Scholarship”:

The language of the sagas is the paragon for the standard of modern Icelandic. The “pure-language crusade” draws on it for its inspiration, and in fact you could justly argue that Snorri Sturluson [poet, scholar, writer of *Snorra-Edda*, 1179-1241] and Halldor Kiljan Laxness [Icelandic writer and Nobel Prize winner, 1902-1998] wrote in the same language, i.e. that the continuity of the Icelandic written language is unbroken and not separated into periodical units as the English language, which is divided into Old English, Middle English and Modern English. The written standard prevalent today emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries, so Icelandic is among the world’s oldest living written languages.

(My transl. Arnason 1999, 454)

The sagas not only preserve the literature which means so much for the Icelandic nation, but they have served as an epitome for the Icelandic language for almost a thousand years. As discussed in the last section, the manuscripts of the sagas are Iceland’s most valued property and as such, represent Icelandic culture in a concrete form. The importance of this cultural heritage is evident in Andres Indridason’s *Manndomur* (1990), a children’s book set in early 1940s British-occupied Reykjavik, and is based on events of the period. The British feared the arrival of German bombers and advised the Icelanders to take precautionary measures:

All kinds of arrangements were being made to prevent damage to people and property because of possible air raids as we all should know by now. The cultural heritage had already been rescued. Several truckloads of manuscripts had been transported to a safe place in the country. Now it was the children’s turn. Surely they had to be put in a safe place, too.

(My transl. Indridason 1990, 37)

When the manuscripts had been saved, it was the children’s turn, and all children in Reykjavik between the ages of four and thirteen were to be evacuated. Saying that the

Icelanders value the manuscripts more than their children would be putting it too strongly, but this example emphasizes the importance of this national legacy for the Icelandic national character, or *thjodarsal*.

The importance for the sagas to the Icelanders is apparent everywhere in Icelandic culture. Evening courses on a literary reading of the sagas, which conclude in a tour of the places where they are set, are the most popular courses hosted by the University of Iceland's Continuous Education Department. Primary school teachers read to their pupils from the sagas and take them to visit the Arnarnagney Institute, where the manuscripts are displayed. Heroes from the sagas are taken as role models, especially Grettir the Strong for his physical strength and excellence at swimming, and Gunnar a Hlidarenda for his personality and fighting skills. The sagas are repeatedly mentioned in Icelandic children's books: because of the widespread interest, the authors automatically assume that the readers recognise the legendary characters. *Grettis saga* is referred to in Thorvaldur Saemundsson's *Bernskunnar strond* (Saemundsson 1973, 65-6, 162) and *Bjartir dagar* (Saemundsson 1976 52, 95); Helgi Jonsson's *Gaesahud* (Jonsson 1997, 42); and in Gudmundur Olafsson's *Heljarstokk afturabak*, where Jon, the protagonist, calls his little brother "Grettir the Strong" (Olafsson 1998). Gunnar a Hlidarenda, the hero of *Njals saga*, is mentioned in Thordur Helgason's *Tilbuinn undir treverk* (1998, 18) and Gudjon Sveinsson's *Ort rennur aeskublod* (1972, 30). Sigrun Davidsdottir's *Silfur Egils* centres on *Egils Saga* (1989, 56-7) and Larus Mar Bjornsson's *K/K*:

Keflavikurdagar/Keflavikurnaetur denotes to *Gisla Saga Surssonar* (Bjornsson 1995, 9, 112-113, 167, 199]. Other authors draw on or mention outlaw legends, which originate in the sagas, for example Idunn Steinsdottir in *Thokugaldur* and Adalsteinn A. Sigurdsson in the short story "Skogaraevintyri" (Steinsdottir 1996; Sigurdsson 1985, 12). Karl Helgason's protagonist in *I pokahorninu* dreams of entering into a brotherhood-in-blood like the heroes of the sagas used to do (Helgason 1990, 41). It is notable that most of these are not historical novels: they are "realistic" stories written by authors who take for

granted that their readers know the sagas and share the national affection for their legendary heroes.

Gudlaug Richter's *Sonur Sigurdar* and *Jora og eg* are, however, historical novels set in the times of the chieftains (Richter 1987; 1988). Jora's father has a precious asset: he is one of the few people in the Iceland of 1104 who could write and is employed by the church as a transcriber – an important medium for preserving the language. Kristjan Arnason emphasises the importance of religious writing for preserving the language: its application creates a standard or criterion which keeps together societies and groups that denote to the standard. According to Arnason, the fact that the Bible was translated into Icelandic in the 16th century is critical for the history of the Icelandic language. In Norway, where this was not done, matters took a different direction, as stated above, and Danish had a much greater influence on the national language (Arnason 1999, 454).

Icelandic folktales, both oral and written, have also had an important part to play in the preservation of the language and the fortification of national identity. Icelandic folklorist Hallfredur Orn Eiriksson has pointed out their importance in several articles (Eiriksson 1979; Eiriksson 1980), and his colleague at the Arnarnagney Institute, Gisli Sigurdsson, points out the importance of the sagas and folktales:

The Icelandic sagas thus became one of the most important factors in the creation of Icelandic national identity in the 19th and early 20th century along with the first large printed collection of folktales, which appeared in two large volumes in 1862-64, . . . and was extremely influential in creating a sense of cultural identity among the people as a nation (the Icelandic word for 'folk' in 'folktale' is *þjóð*, that is, the same word as that used for a 'nation', creating the impression that Icelandic folktales were more Icelandic than anything else and that nothing equivalent was to be found elsewhere).

(Sigurdsson 1996, 42-43)

Icelandic folk tales are, then, not tales of "the common people," but tales of the nation. They are not written in the language of "the common people," but the language of the nation (which was the same). Therein lies a lot of their exceptional value. Thorvaldur

Saemundsson's children's book, *Bernskunnar strond* illustrates how valuable they are to the Icelanders:

The teacher seemed to be very fond of folktales. He told us that they were written in a rich and magnificent language and that their value lay mainly in the fact how interwoven they were with the nation's struggle for survival in its early ages, its belief in hidden spirits and mystic things, as well as the everyday experiences of the people in good times and bad, their religion, philosophy and poetic imagination. He urged us to read such literature, because in addition to being a source of entertainment for keen young people, they were, like the sagas, among the greatest works written in the Icelandic language. I found it interesting to hear that it had not only been learned men who had recorded these tales, but that the common people, women and men, all over the country, had been involved.

(My transl. Saemundsson 1973, 65)

It is worth mentioning that Saemundsson's book was published two years after the first batch of manuscripts was formally delivered to the Icelanders by the captain of a Danish frigate which brought them from Copenhagen, where they had been kept for three centuries, and the national spirit was soaring. Saemundsson also compounds the fact that the folktales are a record of people's lives, all over the country, and that they put in a nutshell the common experiences of the whole nation.

As mentioned in my overview of the Icelandic children's books selected for this thesis, the majority of Icelandic children's books have some mention of folktales, either as a passing remark or a focal point, and their relationship with landscape is discussed in the section on the "Living Landscapes of Iceland", in Chapter 6. What is quite important is that Iceland's national hero, Jon Sigurdsson (1811-1879) was a Romantic and his admiration and emphasis on the importance of the common people, the folktales, and the landscape in the decolonising process lingered on throughout independence celebrations of the 20th century.

The sagas and folktales, both oral and written, not only have a great part in preserving the life and the language of the middle ages, but they also contributed to diminishing both class distinctions and the split of the Icelandic language into local vernaculars. According to Jesse L. Byock, the texts of the sagas centre on personal crises arising from threats to a person's status, wealth, or honour. "Unlike other contemporaneous medieval literatures,

the family sagas offer a clear view of the ‘little’ people of history” (Byock 1992, 44). The sagas and folktales are connected with the “little” or common people, and therefore do not lead to a rift between “high” culture and “low” culture: they underscore equality. These have also contributed towards an “equality” between parts of Iceland, a balance between regions. Terry Lacy points out that the literary heritage and the frequent travelling of fishermen, farm hands and others around the country helped “to promote and sustain the use of a single language rather than fracturing into dialects” (Lacy 1998, 26). For all of these reasons, it is obvious why the language, the sagas, and the folktales have come to influence the Icelandic national character to such a great degree.

This chapter about national heritage in general, and in particular that of England and Iceland, illustrates the importance of history and heritage in the revival and preservation of national identity. As David Lowenthal has so thoroughly illustrated, the heritage crusade, or a deliberately interpreted past, has swamped European countries, including both England and Iceland. The heritage campaign has impinged upon various aspects of modern life, including the education of children and their invocation into the community we call a nation. Museums and manuscripts, heirlooms and amulets, as well as tales of the brave heroes of ancient times, are part of their everyday reality. Children’s literature forms a vital link in the transmission of the national heritage from former generations to the present ones. In itself, children’s literature has become a heritage, as Lowenthal demonstrates: “Peter Rabbit, the world’s oldest licensed character, has spawned 18 million replicas, and Japanese devotees of Beatrix Potter’s cuddlesome creatures all but engulf her Hilltop Farm” (Lowenthal 1998, 95).

History and heritage formed this last part of the discussion in this thesis. The triangular model, with children’s literature at the centre, is thus closed: history and heritage bring the thread back to identity. My journey through the landscapes and histories of England and Iceland – as presented in the two nations’ children’s books – has come to an end.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Tempora mutantur nos et mutamur in illis
[The times are changing and we are changing with them]

As a child, from the age of eight to the early teenage years, I read almost each and every one of Enid Blyton's books, especially those featuring the Famous Five, not once, not twice, but half a dozen times at least. Although I read them in Icelandic and the children bore Icelandic names, I knew they were English children in an English landscape. I had never seen England, but these provided me with a pretty clear picture of what I perceived "England" to be through the reading. The English landscape was to me castles, caves and mysterious islands; English dietary habits were typified by sumptuous sandwiches, whilst the English way of life which was represented was one of holidays without parents, and no financial worries. I was also very fond of Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren, which convinced me that it was much better to live in Sweden than in Iceland, because children in Sweden had tall trees and huge gardens; they could roam around in shorts and T-shirts, whilst we Icelandic children always had to wear sweaters, and they could live alone in a house of their own if they wanted to. Another example of such cultural absorption through reading and re-construction through text was in relation to Germany. My mental picture of Germany was enhanced by the brothers Grimm's fairy-tales: From such reading I deduced that German parents were negligent, and there were deep and dark woods where one could get lost. The Icelandic "woods" were bushes, where you would find your way if you just stood up straight. America furthermore, was a place dotted with little houses on the prairie, and shady towns where duels took place at noon, and so on, and so on – for each national representation in the texts there were key indicators which defined differences to my Icelandic experience, and which defined sameness about the various cultures.

Reflecting analytically on such reading experiences as an adult, there are two relevant positions to consider: on the one hand, “defining” national characteristics such as the people’s way of life, their interaction with the environment, political, religious and philosophical views and values, may be reflected in children’s literature, and on the other, these reflections may not necessarily be true. Consider therefore the example above of my childhood perceptions drawn from my reading of German literature: although German parents did not take their children into the dark woods and leave them there, the fairy tales were told, and written, by people who feared the dark woods and wanted to keep their children from wandering into them. What one can deduce is that there are cultural indicators embedded in narratives which have relevances specific to and arising from particular national circumstances. “A little house on the prairie,” to pursue the American example, reflects the American people’s dream of freedom, and their family values, whilst a duel at noon highlights the rugged individualism so cherished by Americans. So, even if a story written for children is “untrue”, a number of “truths” can be deduced from it, reflecting the society which produced the story: the writer; the editors who approved of it; the publishing house which gambled on it; the people who bought it for their and other people’s children and the reading public who would be the consumers of images of their own culture. Generally, these individuals belong to the same nation: they are all drivers or passengers in the same road system, governed by the same signs, to reiterate the metaphor used earlier for depicting national identity.

As the study of children’s literature has become incorporated into comparative studies, critics such as Maria Nikolajeva have posited the question: “Is there such a thing as national children’s literature that reflects national mentality, specific social history, views on education, and so on?” (Nikolajeva 1995, xi). My position, based on such considerations as above, was that I wanted to prove that indeed, there *is*.

My initial hypothesis was that the keys to national identity lay embedded in children's literature. By applying a comparative analysis to a selection of children's literature from two European nations, I planned to confirm that there are indeed vast differences in the "ways of thinking" and the outlook of the English and the Icelandic people, and that these differences are deeply entrenched in the "national character", and to interrogate those positions in order to consider the relationship between national identity and writing for children. I planned to focus on certain elements, mainly history, landscape and cultural and national identity, to see how they were reflected in the children's books of each of the two nations.

However, this initial clear plan was not sufficiently sophisticated, because it did not cover the complexities which were emerging as was evident by my preliminary reading and research. The complexities arose from the identification of the key words, and the variables which emerged as a result of the inter-relationships between the lines of research from those starting keys and the selection of the most pertinent theoretical orientation. Originally my orientation was a Marxist study of cultural identity in English and Icelandic children's books, since this would enable a comprehensive study of the two cultures. However, in carrying out such research in terms of Marxism, regarding "culture" or "cultural identity", it quickly became apparent that the work of Raymond Williams was central. After reading his major works, and some articles and books about his works, it was clear that the theoretical orientation of my work lay in a cultural materialist study instead of Marxism. Immediately, doorways opened, my key words were all there: the effects of *history*, man's interaction with *landscape*, *unequal power relationships*, transmission of *values*, and the *class* discussion which had originally attracted me to Marxism was still there. In addition, cultural materialism considers that the "truths" in literature are not necessarily "truths": i.e. applied to my area of thinking that the reflections of society in children's books may be false reflections. A cultural materialist approach had been used by many anthropologists in the study of cultural groups and

nations, and thus would be the theoretical orientation required for a comprehensive study of national identity in the children's literature of two nations. By this point, I had eliminated "cultural identity" from the proposed title because of the dominant homogeneity in Iceland, where "cultural identity" and "national identity" can hardly be separated.

From this point, by reading through a cultural materialist position I re-visited and revised my initial considerations. I made a list of the things I wanted to identify and interrogate, which were, as noted in Section 2.5: values, ideology, history, tradition, language and landscape. I considered that these would be factors which determined the essence of the variables between national literatures. Using a list of awarded books, with additional recommendations from experts within the field of children's literature in England and in Iceland, I selected almost a hundred books from each nation. I started reading the books, making notes for each book under these six headings. Gradually, as the reading progressed, these headings split into sub-headings. Values became personal, family and national values; tradition became norms and traditions; history became historical effects and heritage, language split into preservation, dialect, class; and landscape into a fascinatingly sophisticated range of subcategories, which I had not predicted to find: "representative" landscapes, "living" landscapes, "industry-related effects" on landscape, "class-related" landscape, "city and country" landscape, "reading" landscape, and "home" landscape (meaning childhood landscape, roots in the landscape, irretrievable landscape).

In the process of carrying out and developing the research, I focussed my thinking by the production of a number of articles, for example on cultural values or indicators (Palsdottir 1999), living landscapes (Palsdottir 2000A), and representative landscapes (Palsdottir 2000B). In the process of the research I also refined my book selection, eliminating those which did not include "primary" material in relation to my identified areas, and adding others which I discovered: the final focus of texts was forty-three books from each of the

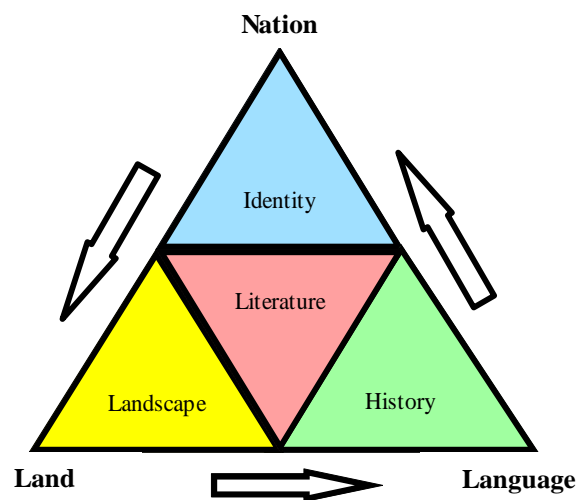
two countries, eighty-six in all. The selection had been made from the reading of a few hundred books and articles.

The task ahead was how to connect the different headings: all these “threads” which – I was now convinced by the evidence emerging through my research – combined to weave the pattern of national identity. I realised then that I had enough material about landscape to write an entire thesis on landscape in English and Icelandic children’s books. I thought that maybe I could cut out some of the other original topics. The editing process started with values, however I realised that if the discussion on values was extracted from the argument, my discussion about man’s interaction with landscape lost some of its support, since the evaluation of this relationship of interaction is value-laden. We learn how to value landscape, and therefore our views on the immediate environment become a part of our value system. Norms and traditions were next on the expulsion list, but I encountered a similar difficulty since the appreciation of landscape is formed by tradition, and tradition is formulated through the inter-relationship with landscape, and we thus develop therefore landscape “tastes and predispositions” or “norms” cherished by our nation. Next: language, but language is interconnected with landscape; the division of landscape into areas, for instance, often results in dialects. History? No, landscape tastes have been influenced by history, and, furthermore, the history of one nation has some bearing on landscape, for example its wars or lack of defences, including and conquests and losses. Neither could heritage be ignored, because of our ancestors’ footsteps in the soil, their tombstones in the landscape – heritage is part of the central consciousness of nationality, the ways in which nations “remember who they are.”

The attempted elimination process was, at least, successful in one way, for it reassured me that each one of these topics was relevant, and also indicated how I should prioritise the areas, for some were more important than others, especially landscape, and these would proportionally get more coverage. The dominant categories were still landscape, history

and identity. The problem remained: how to entwine the key topics and yet keep the subcategories from migrating across the category boundaries I had set.

The solution came to my mind, like so many simple answers to complex questions, in the middle of the night, and it came in the shape of a triangle. For the next days, my desk looked like a graphic designer's drawing board, with triangles and shapes and arrows and different colour paper slips. I designed a model to demonstrate the interplay i.e. triangulate the relationships, between landscape, history and national identity, and the model would also help me to construct the outline of the thesis:



This triangular model tessellates the key concepts: landscape, history, and identity to surround literature, placed within the trinity of nation, land and language. Within the “identity” triangle, there would be a chapter on values, norms, tradition and language (Chapter 4), and a chapter on national identity, the “national character” and focussing on particularities of the English and Icelandic people, i.e. war and foreign threats in England and fatalism, dreams and seamanship in Iceland (Chapter 5). These chapters would underpin the discussion on landscape in the next triangle, the very centre of my argument, which was divided into two chapters (6 and 7). The last triangle encompassed one chapter on heritage and history (Chapter 8). The first three chapters were needed for the

Introduction, theoretical considerations and a survey of the primary material (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), and, of course a Conclusion (Chapter 9).

Having made the outline, the writing-up stage became much less confusing, but also raised another problem which unexpectedly led to my being able to situate my thesis more clearly in relation to current research and critical thinking in the study of children's literature. In the writing-up process my section on the definition of national identity was way too long, despite major revision and editing: the length was required because there had been no definition of national identity in the field of children's literature which I could then apply to my own work. A collection of articles edited by Margaret Meek, *Children's Literature and National Identity*, was published when I was engaged in writing-up (Meek 2000). Like any scholar at the end of a comprehensive study, I feared that some of the articles would interject my studies, or at least be faintly similar. My fears were ungrounded, the articles were on other subjects than mine – although at least one discussed World War II in British children's books. Moreover, I realised that none of the authors had defined national identity, except for a line or two: most of them were looking for instances of national identity, or the name of the country being mentioned, or the love (or hate) of a country being expressed – thus confirming the need for me to produce a comprehensive section on national identity. My study, on the other hand, seeks to reveal *hidden* allusions to a common national identity: the road signs that we are not aware of. I saw that in order to support my argument a thorough definition of national identity was pertinent, and none of what was left could be omitted.

The other problem was my discussion of landscape. I had, within the landscape triangle, dozens of pages on different topics, all about landscape, but there was no obvious interconnected line of thinking – the red thread weaving itself through them – until I read Peter Wallace Preston, *Political-Cultural Identity: Citizens and Nations in a Global Era* (Preston 1997), which had been referred to by Tony Watkins. Peter Wallace Preston's

concept derived from what he calls the “trio” of locale, network and memory, coincided with my notes from Watkins and Raymond Williams, and led to what I call the three kinds of home. All my different landscape threads fit into these three kinds of home: home as an interior space, second, the homeland (in country or city) and third, a *heimat* that human beings inevitably strive for. Chapter 6 covered the first kind, and Chapters 7 and 8 the second and third kind of home.

Finally, nothing was left but to write this Conclusion. I had conducted a thorough study, an extensive analysis of eighty-six books, and what had I found: where was the ultimate truth? I wrote a conclusion making grand statements on the importance of difference, that I had “proved” this and that with my thesis. Later, I came to realise that this is not a scientific study: it is not an analysis which leads to statements of percentages and proportions. “Truths” found in a cultural materialist study, or any other study of literature, will remain in quotation marks. I set out to find “differences and particularities” and found out that the differences are not what matters, it is the particularities. Wrongly, I set out to find parallels. I wanted to discuss war in English children’s books, which was right, and searched for a parallel in Icelandic children’s books, which was wrong. I set out to find living landscapes in Icelandic children’s books, which was right, and searched for corresponding occurrences in English children’s books, wrong again.

For example, the repeated references to war and the Blitz in English children’s books is what makes them unique. Being English is remembering the Blitz (whether one was born before that time or not). Correspondingly, the living landscapes in Icelandic children’s books is what makes them distinctive. Believing that elves live in the landscape, being awed by troll figures in the lava, is being Icelandic. I could go on and on, reiterating the material covered in the thesis, but that would be pointless. The point is that all these nuances of national identity reflected in the books analysed here do not “prove” anything, but combined into a whole, evaluated with the help of theoretical methods, supported with

a thorough analysis of what national identity is, *suggest* that children's books are indeed an ideal source for examining the complexity of the national character. Children's books obviously offer a doorway to the "national character", and the paradigmatic model designed for my analysis provides a key to open that door: it functions as a theoretical model which could be applied to research contexts other than these selected for this study.

The land from which we grow, and the organising constructs of national identity, have been shown in this study to be essential, else we all become cloned cultural nomads, unable to place ourselves in this rich relationship of cultural differences. This comparison, although it covers only two nations, goes to show that writers of children's books are deeply rooted in their native soil, be it one of rolling hills or rocky crags. They have enormous power in their words: they can interpret landscape and history. The implied image of the nation's history and landscapes may not be "true", but it is true to the nation's image of what it wants its history to have been and what it imagines its country to look like, ideally. In a changing world, a world of competing and converging nations, societies need some "anchors" to help them to cling to their native rock. Representative landscapes provide one anchor; shared and imagined histories another — and collective memories yet another. These, and other factors, have a part in forming the national frame of mind. Children's books allow us to visualise that collective framework, providing a tool towards deepening the understanding of the differences — and similarities — between cultures and nations, showing us what makes the national heart beat.

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APPENDIX I: FAMILY PATTERNS OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Books portraying a protagonist who belongs to a “nuclear family”:

English	Icelandic
<i>The Weirdestone of Brisingamen</i> (Garner 1960)	<i>Strakar i Straumey</i> (Sigurdsson 1969)
<i>The Moon in the Cloud</i> (Harris 1968)	<i>Ört rennur æskublod</i> (Sveinsson 1972)
<i>Watership Down</i> (Adams 1972)	<i>Bernskunnar strönd</i> (Saemundsson 1973)
<i>The Peppermint Pig</i> (Bawden 1975)	<i>Polli, eg og allir hinir</i> (Jonasson 1973)
<i>The Machine-Gunners</i> (Westall 1976)	<i>Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni</i> (Helgadóttir 1974)
<i>A Kind of Wild Justice</i> (Ashley 1978)	<i>Bjartir dagar</i> (Saemundsson 1976)
<i>Dance on my Grave</i> (Chambers 1982)	<i>Berjabítur</i> (Jonsson 1978)
<i>The Song of Pentecost</i> (Corbett 1982)	<i>Agnarogn</i> (Jonsson 1979)
<i>Granny Was a Buffer Girl</i> (Doherty 1986)	<i>Lyklabarn</i> (Indridason 1979)
<i>The Cry of the Wolf</i> (Burgess 1990)	<i>Sitji guds englar</i> (Helgadóttir 1983)
<i>Dear Nobody</i> (Doherty 1991)	<i>Saman i hring</i> (Helgadóttir 1986)
<i>Stone Cold</i> (Swindells 1993)	<i>Emil og Skundi</i> (Olafsson 1986)
<i>The Mennymys</i> (Waugh 1993)	<i>Saenginni yfir minni</i> (Helgadóttir 1987)
<i>Junk</i> (Burgess 1996)	<i>Silfur Egils</i> (Davíðsdóttir 1989)
<i>The Tulip Touch</i> (Fine 1996)	<i>Alagadalurinn</i> (Baldursdóttir 1989)
<i>Forever X</i> (McCaughrean 1997)	<i>I þokahorninu</i> (Helgason 1990)
<i>Fire, Bed and Bone</i> (Branford 1997)	<i>Manndómur</i> (Indridason 1990)
<i>Skellig</i> (Almond 1998)	<i>Gegnum þyrnigerdid</i> (Steinsdóttir 1991)
	<i>Dvergasteinn</i> (Sigurdsson 1991)
	<i>Benjamin dufa</i> (Fridrik Erlingsson 1992)
	<i>Ped a planetunni jord</i> (Arnadóttir 1995)
	<i>Silfurkrossinn</i> (Illugi Jökulsson 1996)
	<i>Þokugaldur</i> (Steinsdóttir 1996)
	<i>Her a reiki</i> (Hrólfssdóttir 1996)
	<i>Aevintýrlegt samband</i> (Indridason 1997)
	<i>Gaesahud</i> (Jonsson 1997)
	<i>Galdrastafir og graen augu</i> (Palsdóttir 1997)
	<i>Nottin lifnar við</i> (Thrainsson 1998)
	<i>Tilbuinn undir treverk</i> (Helgason 1998)
	<i>Radgata um raudanott</i> (Möller 1998)
	<i>Fraenkuturninn</i> (Sigurdardóttir 1998)
	<i>Heljarstokk afturabak</i> (Olafsson 1998)
	<i>Navigi a hvalaslod</i> (Jonsson 1998)
	<i>Vestur i blainn</i> (Steinsdóttir 1999)

Orphaned children or absent parents:

English	Icelandic
<i>Gumble's Yard</i> (1961)	<i>Eg heiti Blidfinnur en thu matt kalla mig Bobo</i> (Thorsteinsson 1998)
<i>The Diddakoi</i> (Godden 1972)	
<i>Tulku</i> (Dickinson 1979)	
<i>The Witches</i> (Dahl 1983)	
<i>Why Weeps the Brogan?</i> (Scott 1989)	
<i>Street Child</i> (Doherty 1993)	
<i>The Kingdom by the Sea</i> (Westall 1990)	
<i>Northern Lights</i> (Pullman 1995)	
<i>The Butterfly Lion</i> (Morpurgo 1996)	
<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i> (Rowling 1997)	

Other family patterns, or indeterminate

English	Icelandic
<i>The Wind in the Willows</i> (Grahame 1908)	<i>Berjabitur</i> (Jonsson 1978)
<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> (Lewis 1950)	<i>Breidholtsstrákur fer i sveit</i> (Stefansdottir 1985)
<i>The Weirdestone of Brisingamen</i> (Garner 1967)	<i>Jora og eg</i> (Richter 1988)
<i>A Pair of Jesus Boots</i> (Sherry 1969)	<i>Brak og brestir</i> (Jonsson 1993)
<i>Carrie's War</i> (Bawden 1973)	<i>Sonur Sigurdar</i> (Richter 1987)
<i>Red Shift</i> (Garner 1973)	<i>Gauragangur</i> (Simonarson 1988)
<i>John Diamond</i> (Garfield 1980)	
<i>Goodnight Mister Tom</i> (Chambers 1982)	<i>K/K</i> (Bjornsson 1995)
<i>The Nature of the Beast</i> (Howker 1985)	<i>Thad sem enginn ser</i> (Hrolfsdottir 1998).
<i>Pack of Lies</i> (McCaughrean 1988)	
<i>Wolf</i> (Cross 1990)	
<i>An Angel for May</i> (Burgess 1992)	
<i>Maphead</i> (Howarth 1995)	
<i>The Subtle Knife</i> (Pullman 1997)	
<i>The Sterkarm Handshake</i> (Price 1999)	

APPENDIX II: THE SELECTION IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Year	Title	Author	Award
1908	<i>The Wind in the Willows</i>	Kenneth Grahame	
1950	<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i>	C. S. Lewis	
1960	<i>The Weirdstone of Brisingamen</i>	Alan Garner	
1961	<i>Gumble's Yard</i>	John Rowe Townsend	C
1967	<i>The Owl Service</i>	Alan Garner	C, G
1968	<i>The Moon in the Cloud</i>	Rosemary Harris	C
1969	<i>A Pair of Jesus Boots</i>	Sylvia Sherry	
1972	<i>Watership Down</i>	Richard Adams	C, G
	<i>The Diddakoi</i>	Rumer Godden	W
1973	<i>Carrie's War</i>	Nina Bawden	
	<i>Red Shift</i>	Alan Garner	
1975	<i>The Peppermint Pig</i>	Nina Bawden	G
	<i>The Machine-Gunners</i>	Robert Westall	C
1978	<i>A Kind of Wild Justice</i>	Bernard Ashley	
1979	<i>Tulku</i>	Peter Dickinson	C, W
1980	<i>John Diamond</i>	Leon Garfield	W
1982	<i>Dance on my Grave</i>	Aidan Chambers	
	<i>Goodnight Mister Tom</i>	Michelle Magorian	G
	<i>The Song of Pentecost</i>	W.J. Corbett	W
1983	<i>The Witches</i>	Roald Dahl	W
1985	<i>The Nature of the Beast</i>	Janni Howker	W
1986	<i>Granny Was a Buffer Girl</i>	Berlie Doherty	C
1988	<i>A Pack of Lies</i>	Geraldine McCaughrean	C, G
1989	<i>Why Weeps the Brogan?</i>	Hugh Scott	W
1990	<i>The Kingdom by the Sea</i>	Robert Westall	G
	<i>The Cry of the Wolf</i>	Melvin Burgess	
	<i>Wolf</i>	Gillian Cross	C
1991	<i>Dear Nobody</i>	Berlie Doherty	C
1992	<i>An Angel for May</i>	Melvin Burgess	
1993	<i>Street Child</i>	Berlie Doherty	
	<i>Stone Cold</i>	Robert Swindells	C
	<i>The Mennymys</i>	Sylvia Waugh	
1995	<i>Northern Lights</i>	Philip Pullman	C, G
	<i>Maphead</i>	Lesley Howarth	G
1996	<i>The Butterfly Lion</i>	Michael Morpurgo	
	<i>Junk</i>	Melvin Burgess	C, G
	<i>The Tulip Touch</i>	Anne Fine	W
1997	<i>Fire, Bed and Bone</i>	Henrietta Branford	G
	<i>Forever X</i>	Geraldine McCaughrean	
	<i>The Subtle Knife</i>	Philip Pullman	
	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	J. K. Rowling	
1998	<i>Skellig</i>	David Almond	C
1999	<i>The Sterkarm Handshake</i>	Susan Price	G

English children's books selected for the study, in chronological order

(C=Carnegie Medal, G=The Guardian Award, W=Whitbread Book of the Year)

Year	Title	Author	Awards
1969	<i>Strakar i Straumey: Drengjasaga</i>	Eiríkur Sigurdsson	

1972	<i>Ört rennur æskublod</i> ("Young Blood Flows Fast")	Gudjon Sveinsson	
1973	<i>Bernskunnar strönd</i> ("Childhood's Coast")	Thorvaldur Saemundsson	
	<i>Polli, eg og allir hinir</i> ("Polli, Me, and All the Others")	Jonas Jonasson	
1974	<i>Jon Oddur og Jon Bjarni</i> ("Jon Oddur and Jon Bjarni")	Gudrun Helgadóttir	R
1976	<i>Bjartir dagar</i> ("Sunny Days")	Thorvaldur Saemundsson	R
1978	<i>Berjabitur</i> ("Berry Picker")	Páll H. Jonsson	R
1979	<i>Agnarogn</i> ("Tiny")	Páll H. Jonsson	R
	<i>Lyklabarn</i> ("Latchkey Kid")	Andres Indridason	
1983	<i>Sitji guds englar</i> ("All God's Angels")	Gudrun Helgadóttir	
1985	<i>Gummiskor med gati (short stories)</i>	Heimir Pálsson, ed.	
	<i>Breidholtsstrakur fer í sveit</i>	Dóra Stefánsdóttir	
1986	<i>Saman í hring</i> ("Together in a Circle")	Gudrun Helgadóttir	
	<i>Emil og Skundi</i> ("Emil and Skundi")	Gudmundur Ólafsson	B, I
1987	<i>Saenginni yfir minni</i> ("Over my Bed")	Gudrun Helgadóttir	
	<i>Sonur Sigurðar</i> ("Son of Sigurd")	Gudlaug Richter	
1988	<i>Gauragangur</i> ("All Hell Loose")	Ólafur H. Simonarson	
1988	<i>Jora og eg</i> ("Iora and I")	Gudlaug Richter	I
1989	<i>Silfur Egils</i> ("Egil's Silver")	Sigrún Davíðsdóttir	R
	<i>Alagadalurinn</i> ("The Enchanted Valley")	Heiður Baldursdóttir	B
1990	<i>I pokahorninu</i> ("That Extra Something")	Karl Helgason	B
	<i>Manndómur</i> ("Manhood")	Andres Indridason	I
1991	<i>Gegnum þyrnigerðid</i> ("Through the Thistle")	Ídunn Steinsdóttir	B, IH
	<i>Dvergasteinn</i> ("Dwarfstone")	Adalsteinn A. Sigurðsson	
1992	<i>Benjamin dufa</i> ("Benjamin Dove")	Friðrik Erlingsson	B, R, I
1993	<i>Brak og brestir</i> ("Squeaking and Screeching").	Elias Snaeland Jonsson	B
1995	<i>Ped á planetunni jord</i> ("A Pawn on Planet Earth")	Ólga Gudrun Arnadóttir	IH, I
	<i>K/K: Keflavíkurdagar/Keflavíkurnaetur</i>	Larus Már Björnsson	
1996	<i>Silfurkrossinn</i> ("The Silver Cross")	Illugi Jökulsson	R
	<i>Thokugaldur</i> ("Magic in the Mist")	Ídunn Steinsdóttir	
	<i>Her á reiki</i> ("Spirits in the Air")	Gunnhildur Hrólfsdóttir	I
1997	<i>Aevintýrlegt samband</i> ("A Fairy-Tale Relationship")	Andres Indridason	
	<i>Gaesahud</i> ("Goosebumps")	Helgi Jonsson	
	<i>Galdrastafir og graen augu</i> ("Magic Letters and Green Eyes")	Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir	
1998	<i>Nottin lifnar víð</i> ("The Night Comes Alive")	Þorgrímur Thrafnisson	
	<i>Tilbuinn undir treverk</i> ("Ready for Woodwork")	Þorður Helgason	
	<i>Thað sem enginn sér</i> ("What No-One can see")	Gunnhildur Hrólfsdóttir	
	<i>Radgata um raudanott</i> ("Mystery in the Middle of the Night")	Ingibjörg Moller	
	<i>Fraenkuturninn</i> ("The Auntie Tower")	Steinunn Sigurðardóttir	
	<i>Heljarstökk afturabak</i> ("A Backwards Somersault")	Gudmundur Ólafsson	B
	<i>Navigi á hvalaslod</i> ("In the Trail of Whales")	Elias Snaeland Jonsson	IH
	<i>Eg heiti Blíðfinnur en þú matt kalla mig Bobo</i>	Thorvaldur Þorsteinsson	R
1999	<i>Vestur í bláinn</i> ("Westwards into the Blue")	Kristín Steinsdóttir	

Icelandic children's books selected for the study, in chronological order
(B=The Icelandic Children's Book Prize, R=The Reykjavík School Board Award, I=IBBY)